

Judit Mudriczki

Shakespeare's *Art of Poesy in King Lear*

An Emblematic Mirror of Governance on the Jacobean Stage



The flatterers and traitors both be such,
That with their words their thoughts do not a-
For till iust triall bring them to the tuch, (gree:
They seeme in shew most faithfull friends to bee:
But little will they do, professing much;
And inwardly from friendship they do flee;
Who when their heart behind they do conuay,
They beare in hand their tongue another way.

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Shakespeare's Art of Poesy in King Lear. An emblematic mirror of governance on the Jacobean stage

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An Emblematic Mirror of Governance
on the Jacobean Stage

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INTRODUCTION: *KING LEAR*—A DRAMATIZED EARLY MODERN MIRROR OF GOVERNANCE



For Kings being publike persons, by reason of their office and authoritie, are as it were set (as it was sayd of old) vpon a publique stage, in the sight of all the people; where all the beholders eyes are attentiuely bent, to looke and pry in the least circumstance of their secretest driftes.

(James I, King of England *Basilikon Doron*¹)

This book presents the results of my academic interest in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, an interest that began with my first reading of the play as an undergraduate student. I could not possibly include mention of all the books, articles, lectures, and discussions that generated and influenced the ideas and thoughts to which I have tried to give expression in the following pages. But in order to confine myself to a guiding thread which may provide internal coherence within this accumulated mass of knowledge, I intend to pose and address a single question. Since the main concern of this book is to describe the distinctive features of the Shakespearean text, I phrase this question as follows: what makes the 1608 Quarto version of William Shakespeare's *King Lear* an outstanding and exceptional work of art? My preliminary answer is that this work represents a dramatized mirror of governance, the poetic features of which are determined both by Shakespeare's poetic craft and by the rhetorical tradition set by the public discourses of his age.

Undoubtedly, the term "mirror of governance" bears a strong resemblance to a conventional literary genre called "mirror for princes," which corresponds roughly to the Latin "*speculum principis*" or the German "*Fürstenspiegel*." This correspondence, however, is partial, because the English representatives of the genre published between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries are significantly different from the ones who published on the continent. As Wilhelm Kleineke, the author of the only existing comprehensive monograph

¹ James I, King of England: *Basilikon Doron or His Maiesties Instrvctions to His Dearest Sonne, Henrie the Prince*, London, imprinted by Richard Field, for Iohn Norton, according to the Copie printed at Edenburgh, 1603, sig A1v.

on this topic,² explains, the state in England has never been an abstract idea, but rather has remained a concept strongly connected to the person of the monarch, who is also a legal entity. Therefore, the monarch embodies the moral quality of the people; consequently, English “mirrors” in this period focus on moral issues instead of legal or political ones, and they often lack topical references. English mirrors also imply that political events emerge as the immediate consequence of the moral qualities of the person of the monarch, which explains why these works often become catalogues of virtues. Still, this book does not propose that *King Lear* is to be considered as the dramatized version of any contemporaneous work of this kind, regardless of the fact that some sources which Shakespeare could have used for his play are related to this genre. For instance, *The Mirrour for Magistrates* published by John Higgins in 1574 contains a verse narrative, *The Tragoedye of Cordila*, which gives an account of the Lear story from the youngest sister's point of view, who, in this version, eventually commits suicide in prison.³

My usage of the term “mirror of governance” is broader and more theoretical in scope, and it refers to the well-known characteristic of Shakespearean drama that it provides a theatrical reflection of Early Modern ideas both on the nature of royal power in general and some topical matters related to the governance of the Jacobean state, a feature that distinguishes the 1608 *King Lear* from many other Early Modern versions of the Lear story.

Instead of focusing only on the relevance of its historical context and the topical references of the play, in this book, I am primarily interested in offering a description of the distinctive features of Shakespeare's mastery of composition. I use the term composition to signify the Early Modern unity of the terms “poetics” and “rhetoric,” the former of which refers to the art of creating a piece of literature for the sake of delight and instruction while the latter stands for the construction of persuasive speech. As Brian Vickers explains, the sharp distinction between these two notions emerged only in the post-Romantic period of literary criticism, whereas in Early Modern times,

poetry used techniques of proof and persuasion, addressed itself to the practical intellect and existed as a force for good or evil in the world. Renaissance readers did not regard literary works as autotelic [...] In that period, classical rhetoric,

² Wilhelm Kleineke: *Englische Fürstenspiegel vom Policraticus Johannis von Salisbury bis zum Basilikon Doron König Jakobs I.*, Halle (Saale), Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1937, 1–22.

³ John Higgins: *The First Parte of the Mirour for Magistrates contayning the falles of the first infortunate princes of this lande: from the coming of Brute to the incarnation of our sauour and redemer Iesu Christe*, London, 1574, fol. 47–54.

enthusiastically revived, provided a comprehensive system both for creating and for evaluating works of literature, by which they meant not just poetry, drama and fiction, but also letters, history and philosophical treatises.⁴

Obviously, the description that this book will eventually provide cannot present a comprehensive line-by-line commentary resembling ones offered by critical editions of the play, but it will demonstrate the rhetorical construct of certain passages in order to give insights into the playwright's mastery of contemporaneous poetic knowledge. The task of defining the text, however, requires strict specifications, especially in the case of this particular play. Numerous scholarly works, books, and articles have been published on the textual matters of *King Lear*,⁵ since only about ninety percent of the two available versions, the Quarto and the Folio editions, are identical. The main difference lies in the fact that there are approximately four hundred lines that are not present in one or the other of these editions.⁶ Therefore, it is important to emphasize that my main concern is the text of the 1608 Pied Bull Quarto of *King Lear*,⁷ which is generally considered to be based on Shakespeare's foul papers.⁸

Even if it is difficult to prove whether or not Shakespeare authorized its publication, the Quarto is less likely to show the traces of editorial revision than the Folio version, so it may offer a more reliable perspective for the study of poetic issues. The following sentence on the cover page of this edition supports the idea that the text derives from a performed version: "as it was played before the Kings Maiestie at Whitehall upon S. *Stephans* night in Christmas Hollidayes. By his Maiesties seruants playing vsually at the Gloabe on the Bancke-side."

⁴ Brian Vickers: *Rhetoric and Poetics*, in C.B. Schmitt – Q. Skinner (eds.): *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, 715.

⁵ The most significant works devoted to this topic are a collection of various studies entitled *The Division of the Kingdoms*, edited by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, Steven Urkowitz's 1980 monograph *Shakespeare's Revision of King Lear*, and Richard Knowles' most recent article *The Evolution of the Texts of Lear*. See Gary Taylor – Michael Warren (eds.): *The Division of the Kingdoms. Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear*, Oxford, Calderon Press, 1983; Steven Urkowitz: *Shakespeare's Revision of King Lear*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1980; Richard Knowles: *The Evolution of the Texts of Lear*, in Jeffrey Kahan (ed.): *King Lear: New Critical Essays. Volume 33 of Shakespeare criticism*, New York, Routledge, 2008, 124–154. The deliberate choice of the 1608 Quarto has orthographical consequences as well, since even the names of certain characters appear in different spellings in the two versions and, in accordance with the Quarto edition, I will cite them as "Gonorill" and "Gloster."

⁶ Urkowitz: *Shakespeare's Revision*, 3–4.

⁷ M. William Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King Lear and his three Daughters. With the vnfortunate life of Edgar, sonne and heire to the Earle of Gloster, and his sullen and assumed humor of Tom of Bedlam*, London, 1608. All the quotations on the following pages are from this edition unless otherwise indicated.

⁸ Urkowitz: *Shakespeare's Revision*, 6.

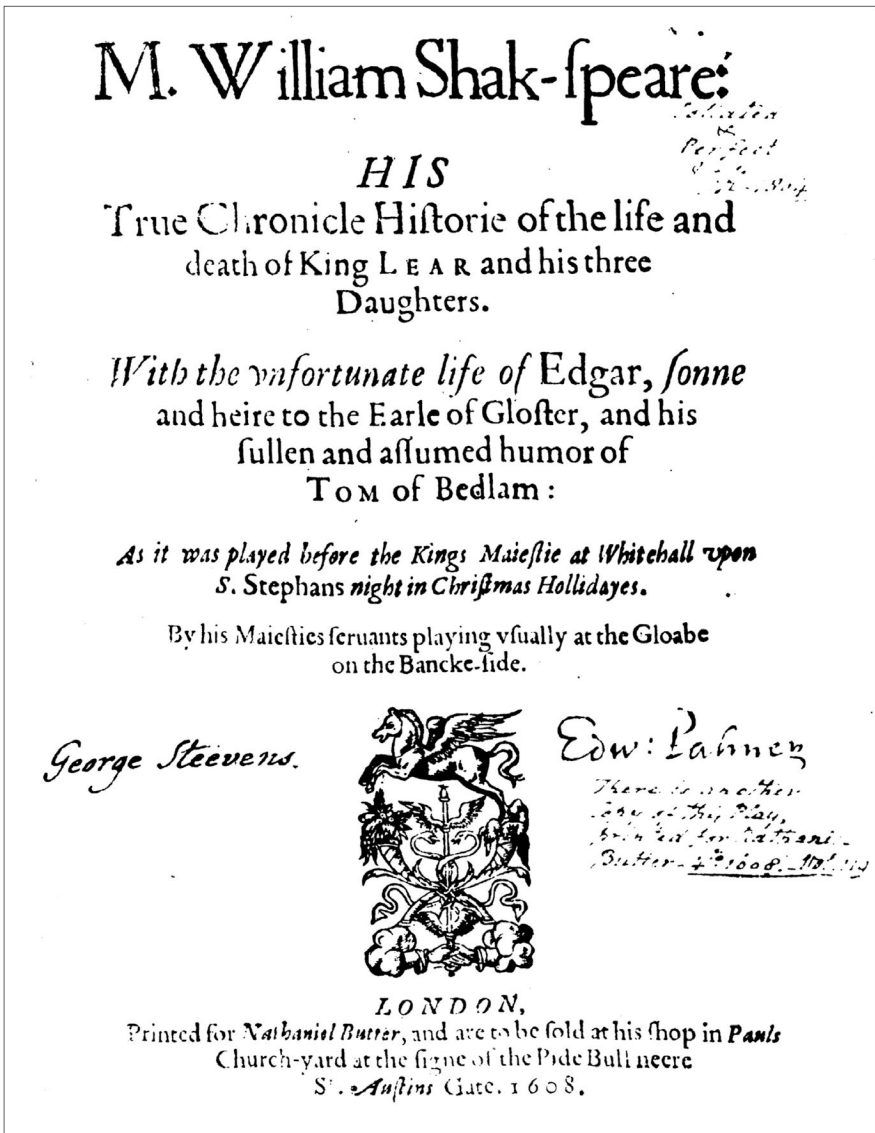


Figure 1. The Cover of the Pied Bull Quarto⁹
Image published with permission of ProQuest LLC.
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⁹ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. A1r. Image produced by ProQuest LLC as part of ProQuest® Early English Books Online (EEBO). www.proquest.com.

Though the exact date of the play's inception is unknown, the Stationer's Register contains the following entry dated November 26, 1607: "Entred for their copie vnder th' hands of Sir George Buck, knight & th' wardens A booke called. Mr William Shakespeare his historye of Kinge Lear as it was played before the Kings maietie at Whitehall vppon St Stephans night at Christmas Last by his maiesties servants playing visually at the globe on Banksyde."¹⁰

Although this record refers to an edition by Nathaniel Butter and John Busby and not to the Pied Bull Quarto, the date given in the Stationer's Register and the allusion to the performance on the cover page of the Pied Bull Quarto suggest that Shakespeare's play debuted on stage at the royal court in 1606 during the monarch's winter solace. John Leeds Baroll explains that this event, established during Queen Elizabeth's reign, meant a special recreation in the middle of winter, which was "necessary to a monarch who otherwise might become dull and demoralized and, through his or her own ill health, in patriarchal theory, bring sickness to the body politic."¹¹ The performance at Whitehall could have been momentous for three further reasons. First, as London had been plague-stricken for most of the year, the public playhouses had closed in spring, and even in the royal court the last entertainment had taken place in August.¹² Consequently, the play that was performed by the King's Men in the Great Chamber at Whitehall in December received special attention after such a long break. This stage was smaller and more intimate than either the Banqueting House or the Great Hall, and it could only accommodate about three hundred people, so the courtiers invited to the performance were the most privileged members of royal circles.¹³ Secondly, Saint Stephen's Day, December 26, or as it is currently known, Boxing Day, marks the liturgical importance of this performance, since it was an official holiday for the Church of England, the head of which was James I. More precisely, it was a day of charity, when the rich showed generosity and hospitality to the poor and outcast. As Leah S. Marcus points out,

on that day, poor boxes in which cash donations had been collected all year would be broken open and the money distributed. Poor people would gather in groups and proceed from house to house asking for a charity which could be denied only

¹⁰ Quoted in Cyndia Susan Clegg: *King Lear and the Early Seventeenth-century Print Culture*, in Jeffrey Kahan (ed.): *King Lear: New Critical Essays. Volume 33 of Shakespeare criticism*, New York, Routledge, 2008, 165.

¹¹ John Leeds Baroll: *Politics, Plague and Shakespeare's Theater*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991, 29.

¹² Ibid., 154–155.

¹³ James Shapiro: *The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2015, 299.

at the peril of those within. Wealthy individuals who participated in the spirit of the day took pride in having an estate on St. Stephen's filled with as many guests as the "howse wolld hold."¹⁴

Third, this period also meant a break during the parliamentary session, which in that year was primarily concerned with the legitimacy of the monarch, whose person established the union between England and Scotland.¹⁵

Nevertheless, it is impossible to prove whether the king was present at the performance of *King Lear* or not. A year earlier, for instance, King James excused himself from attending this traditional form of courtly entertainment so that he could go hunting instead, and only the queen and her two sons attended the performances.¹⁶ Still, when preparing for the occasion, Shakespeare and the company definitely had to bear in mind the assumed audience of the royal court, which must have been a decisive factor during the artistic process of creating the playscript.

KING LEAR HISTORICIZED: THE JACOBAN CONTEXT

Summarizing the history of the critical literature on *King Lear* in his book *Hamlet versus King Lear*, Reginald Armstrong Foakes discusses the latest period under the heading of "historicism."¹⁷ He uses this term to describe a certain tendency among critics who regard the play as a mirror of the political concerns that the monarchs of England faced around 1600 or as a document of history that sheds light on the social and political background of the era.¹⁸ From this point of view, *King Lear* is concerned with "power relations" and the "concept of the crown," which also implies that the character of Lear represents the monarch and the difficulties he faces as a father, a role that is subordinate to his royal character. Having examined the available contemporaneous sources, but first and foremost King James I's writings, researchers like Annabel M.

¹⁴ Leah S. Marcus: Retrospective: King Lear on St. Stephen's Night, 1606, in Leah S. Marcus: *Puzzling Shakespeare. Local Reading and its Discontents*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1988, 154.

¹⁵ James Shapiro devotes a whole book to the events of 1606 in Shakespeare's life in which the chapter "Division of the Kingdoms" summarizes the current views in Shakespeare scholarship on the public discourses on this union. See Shapiro: *The Year*, 33–46.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁷ Reginald Armstrong Foakes: *Hamlet versus Lear. Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, 77.

¹⁸ Although this terminology might easily recall the main principles of New Historical criticism, which is connected to John Drakakis, Stephen Greenblatt, and Leonard Tenenhouse, similarly to Reginald Armstrong Foakes, I also understand it in a more general sense, including any study that regards the interpretation of *King Lear* as primarily the discussion of the corresponding philosophical, theological, and political ideas of the times when it was written.

Patterson and Michael Mangan go as far as to conclude that Lear represents James I himself.¹⁹ Although scholars disagree strongly on the extent to which this contention is warranted, further historical approaches to the play have been unable to disregard Patterson's and Mangan's conclusions.

As far as the topic of dividing the kingdom is concerned, *King Lear* conforms to the tradition of the so-called "Brutus-plays." Holinshed's *Chronicles* records that the renowned founder of Britain, King Brutus, divided his kingdom among his three sons, Lochrine, Camber, and Albanact, in order to prevent future strife among them concerning inheritance.²⁰ On his accession to the throne of England, however, in his *Basilikon Doron*, King James projected the image of the "second Brute" who would reunite England and Scotland, as opposed to Brutus, who had divided it among his sons. Between 1604 and 1606, many works of literature supported this "public image," among which the most outstanding is the 1605 civic pageant *The Triumphes of Re-United Britania*, an excellent dramatic example of Jacobean propaganda by Anthony Munday, Shakespeare's fellow playwright.²¹

Regarding more direct biographical connections, there are some striking similarities between the literary character of King Lear and historical figure of King James I. To begin with, both of them were famous for their fondness of dogs and hunting,²² and like Lear and his Fool, King James I also had a court jester, Archie Armstrong, whose company he particularly enjoyed.²³ Secondly, the name of Cordelia's two suitors, the Duke of Albany and the Duke of Cornwall, corresponded to the titles James I's two sons would hold in those days, a resemblance the audience may have recognized when hearing the very first sentence of the play:²⁴ "I thought the King had more affected the Duke of *Albany* then *Cornwell*."²⁵ Leonard Tennenhouse even remarks that this preference for Albany bearing a Scottish title and also being one of the very few who remains alive at the end of *King Lear* implicitly refers to

¹⁹ See Annabel M. Patterson: *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, Cambridge, MA–Oxford, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 106–109 and Michael Mangan: *Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy*, in Michael Mangan: *A Preface to Shakespeare's Tragedies*, London–New York, Longman, 1991, 102–104.

²⁰ Reginald Armstrong Foakes: Introduction, in William Shakespeare: *King Lear*, ed. Reginald Armstrong Foakes, The Arden Shakespeare. Third series, London, Thomson Learning, 1997, 12.

²¹ For a detailed list of such propaganda pieces see Annabel M. Patterson: "Between our sentence and our power:" *King Lear* and the double text, in Annabel M. Patterson: *Censorship and interpretation. The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England*, London–Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984, 65.

²² Marcus: *Retrospective*, 157.

²³ Mangan: *Elizabethan*, 103.

²⁴ Mary Axton: *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession*, London, Royal Historical Society, 1977, 136.

²⁵ Shakespeare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B1r.

King James I.²⁶ Thirdly, the two monarchs' unusual behavior also bears some similarities, and thus Lear's hysterical outbursts could have echoed James I's hallucinations, caused by the mental illness porphyria from which scholars have since concluded he probably suffered.²⁷ Last but not least, the way *King Lear* presents the importance and defective nature of written correspondence in relation to public affairs also provides some Jacobean resemblances. David M. Bergeron presents a lengthy and rather convincing argument in support of his claim that King James I's must have understood the problematic nature of keeping indirect contact even within family circles since the exchange of letters was the main channel of communication between him and his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, and also his cousin, Queen Elisabeth.²⁸

As for textual connections, some of King James' writings, published and widely read in the first decade of the seventeenth century, have also been found relevant to certain passages of Shakespeare's play. Most recently, Grace Ioppolo has pointed out that certain ideas like filial ingratitude might derive from the *True Law of Free Monarchies*, and *Basilicon Doron* may offer a pretext for the representation of royal wrath.²⁹ Michael Ryan also adds James' *Demonologie* to this list, and he argues that Shakespeare could have used this work for the description of Edgar's demonic quasi-hallucinations when he appears in the guise of Tom o'Bedlam.³⁰

Taking the resemblance between King Lear and King James I to its extremes would lead to fascinating but endless speculations, which is definitely not the goal of this book. Rather, it is worth recalling Foakes' insight that the main problem with this type of historical approach is that it focuses mainly on details and marginalizes the importance of the text as literature that provides a "coherent artistic impression."³¹ Although I still find it essential to bear in mind the possible Jacobean allusions of the play, Foakes' remark provided the initial prompting for me to pursue the textual investigation I present in the following pages.

²⁶ Leonard Tennenhouse: The Theatre of Punishment, in Leonard Tennenhouse: *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres*, New York–London, Methuen, 1986, 142.

²⁷ Margaret Hotine: Lear's Fit of the Mother, *Notes and Queries* 22:6 (1981), 138–41.

²⁸ David M. Bergeron: Deadly Letters in *King Lear*, *Philological Quarterly* 72 (1993), 172–174.

²⁹ Cf. Grace Ioppolo (ed.): *A Routledge Literary Sourcebook on William Shakespeare's King Lear*, London–New York, Routledge, 2003.

³⁰ Michael Ryan: A Historicist Reading of *King Lear*, in Michael Ryan: *Literary Theory: a Practical Introduction*, Malden, MA, Wiley–Blackwell, 1999, 134.

³¹ Foakes: *Hamlet versus Lear*, 245.

THREE PHILOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND THEIR ACADEMIC PRECEDENTS

Exploring both the most recent Shakespeare scholarship and some of the landmark texts in the reception history of *King Lear*, the three main chapters of this book discuss three different layers of the playtext to give insights into the poetic complexity of Shakespeare's craft as a playwright. These three aspects focus on certain poetic issues that, in my view, have received relatively little attention in academic circles in the case of *King Lear*. Beyond presenting the topic-related particularities and the methodological and analytical diversity of these aspects, it is my overall goal to meet the following three criteria: the claims and results I make or cite from secondary sources should be historically valid and philologically accurate, and they should conform to the principle of objectivity in academic argumentation.

The first chapter takes a macrotextual stand and studies the dramatic heritage in order to highlight the dramaturgical features that make the 1608 Quarto different from the preceding versions of the Lear story. In the sixteenth century, the king's tale appeared in many forms ranging from prose works like Raphael Holinsed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* or Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* to such pieces of poetry as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* or John Higgins' *Mirroure for Magistrates*.³² Yet, none of these are dramatic sources meant for theatrical performance, and consequently their textual characteristics are considerably different from those of the 1608 Quarto. For this reason, I disregard the prose and poetic works mentioned above and limit my attention to two particular dramatic works, which I juxtapose with the 1608 playtext. One of them is the anonymous *True Chronicle History of King Leir*, the supposedly most immediate textual source Shakespeare could have used, as it has been convincingly proven by scholars, most recently including Richard Knowles.³³ The other textual cornerstone of the juxtaposition, John Skelton's *Magnyfycence*, however, has never been subjected to a detailed and systematic comparison with *King Lear*. This work is one of the dramatic pieces of Tudor interludes³⁴ that has enjoyed intense scholarly interest in the last two decades and has been perhaps most salient in the writings of well-established scholars like David Bevington, Howard B. Norland, Greg Walker, and Peter Happé. Despite their focus on pre-Shakespearean drama, their academic works introduce an important theatrical background which frames the craft of dramaturgy in the Early Modern period, the traces of which can easily be

³² For a detailed list of sources see Geoffrey Bullough: *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare Vol. VII Major Tragedies: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*, London, Routledge, 1973, 269–308.

³³ Richard Knowles: How Shakespeare Knew *King Leir*, *Shakespeare Survey* 55 (2002), 12–35.

³⁴ In 1991, Greg Walker defined it referring to a subgenre of morality plays that are clearly concerned with issues of public affairs and royal governance.

detected in the Shakespearean text. Ultimately, the novelty of my approach lies in the assumption that these two playtexts provide a double contrast to the 1608 Quarto and that mapping the resemblances and differences between them contributes to a more complex understanding of the global dramaturgical structure and theatrical heritage of the play.

The second chapter focuses on the microstructural layer of the text and looks at the playwright's relationship to Early Modern knowledge of formal rhetoric and poetics, which entered Shakespeare scholarship as a distinct field of study only in the second half of the twentieth century. Still, even the most outstanding scholars, including Brian Vickers, Arthur Kinney, and Heinrich F. Plett, have rarely studied Shakespeare's relationship to contemporaneous rhetorical manuals. The method I apply resembles the close reading critical strategy of New Criticism, but instead of taking a modern interpretive stand, I use the terminology of a contemporaneous handbook, George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*.³⁵ The chapter focuses on the poetic strategies that determine the use of language in two momentous scenes, "the love contest" and "the mock trial," which exemplify the relationship of the Shakespearean text to the standards of decent public speech and behavior in Early Modern England. These two scenes stage public events during which the use of rhetorical tropes is most likely to conform to contemporaneous expectations for public speech, and thus they reveal the embedding of the characters' diction in the public discourses of the early seventeenth century.³⁶ I assume that the characters' diction in *King Lear* is closely related to contemporaneous discourses, which can be traced even from the distance of 400 years. Indirectly, this method may also add new insights to a more classical type of philological research, which aims to explore the most likely sources of William Shakespeare's rhetorical knowledge.

The third chapter has a more theoretical stand and examines the ways in which the Quarto reflects contemporaneous ideas on governance and, thus, Shakespeare's craft, which mediates them in a theatrical manner. More precisely, the chapter combines the study of tropes with the study of certain societal concepts, and it presents my claim that the corporeal image cluster that permeates the playtext figuratively recalls the Early Modern governance theories on the "body politic." By corporeal images, I mean the body-related metaphoric expressions that refer to the Early Modern social structure using body parts as signifiers of various social functions, an analogy that has been

³⁵ Although Kenneth Muir hinted at the assumed textual connection between the Folio version of *King Lear* and Puttenham's book in 1951, the question has not been thoroughly studied.

³⁶ I understand the term "diction" as it refers to the use of language that is specific to a dramatic character and that determines that character's personality traits. The term "discourse," on the other hand, signifies the use of language on a societal level in a given historic period predominantly exercised and thus determined by the institutions of authority and power, quite independently from the theater.

predominantly present in English intellectual thinking since John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*. Since in recent decades considerable attention has been paid in academic circles to the Early Modern knowledge of the body in the physical sense, it seems reasonable to emphasize that this chapter does not intend to follow the line of thinking set by contemporary scholars like Gail Kern Paster, Michael Schoenfeldt, or Jonathan Sawday, who focus on the physiological and psychological aspects of the human body as it was understood in the Renaissance.³⁷ Rather, I intend to reach back to another tradition, the figurative reading of the human body, which has been practiced for centuries in Christian communities, especially when discussing the issues of governance or political and divine authority. Although this approach might seem unusual in the first decades of the twenty-first century, it is not unprecedented among Shakespeare scholars. The most influential scholarship on the representation of the "body politic" in Shakespearean drama includes the works of Ernst Kantorowitz, David George Hale, Mary Axton, and, most recently, Albert Rolls, the last two of whom explicitly focused on the immense importance of the idea of the "King's two bodies" to the interpretation of *King Lear*. The novelty of my perspective lies in the fact that, instead of considering the representation of the theory of the King's two bodies in *King Lear*, I rely on a closely-related yet distinct-in-origin idea known as the organic conception of the state. This idea, most comprehensively described in David George Hale's 1971 book *The Body Politic – a Political Metaphor in Renaissance English Literature*, applies the analogy of the human body to social hierarchy, ascribing certain functions to the various members. To my knowledge, the scholarship on *King Lear* contains no discussion of this kind of textual mapping of the body-related metaphors and their possible meanings in light of this anthropomorphic analogy of the state.

³⁷ For a short yet excellent summary of this trend, see Sean McDowell: The View from the Interior: The New Body Scholarship in Renaissance/Early Modern Studies, *Literature Compass* 3:4 (2006), 778–791. For further details see Mary Floyd-Wilson – Matthew Greenfield – Gail Kern Paster – Tanya Pollard – Katherine Rowe – Julian Yates: Shakespeare and Embodiment: An E-Conversation, *Literature Compass* 2 (2005), 1–13. And also Richard Strier – Carla Mazzio: Two Responses to "Shakespeare and Embodiment: An E-Conversation," *Literature Compass* 3:1 (2005), 15–31.

THE DRAMATURGICAL AND THEATRICAL HERITAGE:
A CONTRASTIVE READING OF *MAGNYFYCENCE*,
KING LEIR AND *KING LEAR*

This chapter juxtaposes the 1608 *King Lear* Quarto with two other Early Modern plays in order to reach a deeper understanding of the playwright's craft. One of these works has long been regarded as Shakespeare's immediate textual source, written sometime between 1588 and 1594 by an anonymous playwright³⁸ and published in 1605 as *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir*.³⁹ The other is John Skelton's *Magnyfycence*,⁴⁰ which Norland calls "the first extant political morality play."⁴¹ The term "contrastive reading" refers to an interpretive attitude or strategy that does not aim to reach a critical judgment on the aesthetic, educational, ethical, moral, or spiritual values of these works but rather lays *King Lear* alongside the other contemporaneous plays to demonstrate its distinctive features, and thus to present a historically valid account of Shakespeare's art.

The anticipated outcome of this reading is twofold. On the one hand, the method of reaching back to possible Early Modern dramatic sources establishes the interpretive frame for a historicized understanding of Shakespearean dramaturgy. On the other hand, it may confirm the assumption that *King Lear* shares certain similarities and shows subtle differences with both works. Obviously, these resemblances are of a different nature, and they thus draw attention to various aspects of Shakespeare's compositional skills.

³⁸ Grace Ioppolo: "A Jointure more or less:" Re-measuring *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his three daughters*, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 17 (2005), 165.

³⁹ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle Historie of King LEIR, and his three daughters, Gonorill, Ragan and Cordella. As it hath bene diners and sundry times lately acted*. LONDON, Printed by Simon Stafford for Iohn Wright, and are to bee sold at his shop at Christes Church dore, next Newsgate Market, 1605.

⁴⁰ John Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, in Greg Walker (ed.): *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2000, 349–408.

⁴¹ Howard B. Norland: *Drama in Early Tudor Britain, 1485–1558*, Lincoln, NB, University of Nebraska Press, 1995, 178.

In the case of the anonymous *Chronicle Historie*, the reason for a close comparison seems rather obvious, even if Shakespeare scholarship has differing opinions as to the extent to which the playwright could have known about or had access to the 1605 playtext. The Leir play was most probably performed on stage in the last decade of Queen Elizabeth's reign by the Queen's Men,⁴² which makes it even more fascinating to explore what made Shakespeare's own adaptation of an already renowned play so unique and distinctive. After a detailed study of both primary and secondary sources, Knowles concludes that, regardless of the "generic, emotional, philosophical, stylistic and substantive" differences⁴³ between the two plays, the sheer number of similarities that Shakespeare's version shares with the anonymous play but not with any other of his possible sources "persuades even the most skeptical that Shakespeare's knowledge of the old play was neither casual nor remote but recent and detailed."⁴⁴ A meticulous discussion of Knowles' arguments would definitely form a digression from the main thread of thought in this present chapter, nevertheless, it seems reasonable to demonstrate with a few examples the kinds of differences and similarities he traced.

Starting with the differences, perhaps the most obvious one is that the two works belong to different genres as we understand this literary term today: the anonymous play is a romance whereas Shakespeare's work is a tragedy.⁴⁵ From a structural point of view, *King Lear* contains the Gloucester subplot and a few important scenes, e.g. the king's fit of madness, which are missing from the *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir*.⁴⁶ Stylistically, Leir manifests "regular verse and plain style," while *King Lear* displays a "*chiaroscuro intensity* and vast range and variety of *Lear's* language."⁴⁷ On the other hand, there are hundreds of elements in the plot that cannot be found in any other sources but only in these two Lear plays. One of them is the scene in which the king accuses his youngest daughter of pride. Another is in the scene in which Leir/Lear, having been rejected by his eldest daughters, wanders with his counselor, Perillus/Kent.⁴⁸ Even if Shakespeare did not borrow any passages word for word from his assumed source, there are certain outstanding verbal resemblances between the two texts. For instance, in the anonymous play Leir addresses Perillus as "Cease, good Perillus, for to call me Lord / And think me but the shaddow of my selfe,"⁴⁹ and in Shakespeare's work Lear poses a series of rhetorical questions to

⁴² Ioppolo: A Jointure, 168.

⁴³ Knowles: How Shakespeare, 13.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁸ For a more detailed list see *ibid.*, 14–15.

⁴⁹ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. D4v.

the Fool, one of which is, “Who is it that can tell me who I am? Lear’s shadow – I would learne that, for by the markes of soueraintie, knowledge, and reason, I should bee false perswaded I had daughters.”⁵⁰

Having listed many other related details, Knowles finally reaches the plausible conclusion that the majority of the resemblances between the two plays is rooted in the similarities in the details of dramatic action, especially in the first and middle part.⁵¹ On the other hand, the relatively few word-for-word textual correspondences and the only occasionally direct linguistic influence of the *Chronicle Historie* suggest that, even if Shakespeare was familiar with the 1605 play, he did not consciously or intentionally borrow words from his assumed source.⁵²

The term “interlude” and the reason for which I chose Skelton’s *Magnyfycence* as the third work for my contrastive analysis need further clarification. Twentieth-century Shakespeare criticism slowly but steadily developed an interest in the relevance of Medieval dramatic heritage to the historically valid understanding of Shakespearean drama. In the 1910s, A. C. Bradley remarked that the sharp distinction between good and evil characters in *King Lear* reflects the influence of morality plays,⁵³ but it was only in the 1970s that academic attention turned to Shakespeare’s possible dramatic sources, other than the anonymous *True Chronicle Historie*. In 1972, Maynard Mack observed that Lear,

stirs memories of a far more ancient dramatic hero variously called Mankind, Everyman, Genus Humanum, Rex Virus, Rex Humanitas, Magnificence, etc. [...] The persons surrounding him are in some sense (again as in the Morality plays) extensions of himself, who will struggle to assist or defeat him.⁵⁴

Mack dedicates an entire chapter in his 1972 book to point out many elements in *King Lear* that derive from the morality tradition, although in his view, they could hardly call to mind this dramatic heritage as late as the first decade of the seventeenth century. He concludes that these resemblances are “not particular to *King Lear* but are the characteristics of Shakespearean dramaturgy throughout his career.”⁵⁵ In 1975, Robert Potter, however, proposes a stronger connection and argues that “*King Lear* is Shakespeare’s supreme, metaphysical,

⁵⁰ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. D1r.

⁵¹ Knowles: *How Shakespeare*, 14–16.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵³ A.C. Bradley: *Shakespearean Tragedy. Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1992, 226.

⁵⁴ Maynard Mack: *King Lear in Our Time*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972, 58.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

idiosyncratic morality play – a work of Gothic dramatic architecture that takes premises, structure and characterizations from medieval precedent and makes of them something utterly unprecedented.”⁵⁶

Research on Tudor drama in the 1990s refines the rather casual claims of earlier scholarship when developing the generic notion of the interlude. This umbrella term denotes different pieces of drama ranging from short plays to any sort of entertainment in Early Modern texts.⁵⁷ However, Greg Walker's introduction to an anthology of Medieval playtexts offers a more crystalized definition and refers to the “Tudor interlude” or “household drama” as a subgenre of morality plays characterized by at least five distinctive elements: these plays were written to be performed indoors in “the great hall of a royal palace or noble manor house;”⁵⁸ they all show “interest in secular and political concerns,” as opposed to moralities, which focus on “the welfare of the human soul;”⁵⁹ they circulated in printed form throughout the sixteenth century; they were performed by more professional players, “perhaps members of the household chapel or traveling troupes;”⁶⁰ and due to these better skilled actors, new dramatic elements could appear in the interludes, for example “the increasingly sophisticated tumbling and word-play which is the crucial element of the characterization of Vices.”⁶¹ As for the particular texts that belong to this genre, Greg Walker lists eight plays: Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucres*; John Skelton's *Magnyfycence*; *The Enterlude of Godly Queene Hester*; John Heywood's *The Four PP* and *The Play of the Weather*; John Bale's *Johan Baptystes Preachynge* and *The Three Laws*; and Sir David Lindsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*. Of these, Skelton's *Magnyfycence*, which was printed in 1530, seems to bear the strongest resemblance to Shakespeare's *King Lear* as far as its dramatic structure is concerned, so it appears to be the ideal choice to show how the general dramaturgical patterns of morality plays appear in *King Lear*.⁶²

⁵⁶ Robert Potter: The Summoning of *King Lear*, in Robert Potter: *The English Morality Play*, London–Boston, Routledge–Kegan Paul, 1975, 152.

⁵⁷ The difficulty of giving a proper definition is described well in the following article: Jean-Paul Debax: Complicity and Hierarchy: a Tentative Definition of the Interlude Genus, in Peter Happé – Wim Hüskén (eds.): *Interludes and Early Modern Society. Studies in Gender, Power and Theatricality*, Amsterdam–New York, Rodopi 2007, 23–42.

⁵⁸ Greg Walker: Politics and Morality: The Interludes. Introduction, in Greg Walker (ed.): *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2000, 305.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁶² The thematic similarity is easily seen even when reading Greg Walker's summary of the plot: “The play concerns the fortunes of a prince, the Magnyfycence of the title, who, despite his claim to have set his court perpetually to rights under the guidance of his wise counselor Measure, is eventually tricked into abandoning that prudent arrangement. Two fools, Fanny and Foly, persuade him to admit into his service a number of ne'er-do-well suitors, Crafty Conveyance, Clokyd Colusyon, Counterfet Countenance and Courtly Abusyon. These vices, by posing as virtues, lead him to banish Measure, and adopt the lifestyle and mannerisms of

It is almost impossible to prove whether or not Shakespeare knew this play, even if it was undoubtedly available in print in his lifetime.⁶³ It is also a fact that in Shakespeare's days, Skelton's name was still remembered but not primarily for having been Henry VIII's Poet Laureate. In his *The Arte of English Poesie*, the connection to Shakespeare of which I will discuss in another chapter, the aforementioned George Puttenham mentions him as a poet who wrote verses similar to the speeches of the Elizabethan dramatic characters of buffoons and vices, and Puttenham emphasizes that Skelton intended to entertain common people.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, from a methodological point of view, *Magnyfycence*, an interlude supposedly written between 1515 and 1523,⁶⁵ or roughly a hundred years before *King Lear*, may also help us focus on the macrotextual elements and patterns that derive from Tudor drama. Thus, *Magnyfycence* provides a perfect antipode to the more immediate source, *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir*.

CONCEPTUAL SIMILARITIES: THEATRICAL MIRRORS OF GOVERNANCE

The thematic similarities between the plays are striking even at first reading, especially when the focus shifts onto the protagonists: *Magnyfycence*, *Leir* and *Lear* are all monarch figures whose fate is of national importance. It is no wonder that scholars have attempted to read these plays as political allegories. Norland, for instance, argues that *Magnyfycence*, written as Skelton's attack against Cardinal Wolsey, has roots in the medieval mirror tradition, as it is a kind of royal instruction addressed to Henry VIII by his tutor, John Skelton.⁶⁶ This claim builds even on intrinsic evidence, as there is a direct reference in

a dissipated braggart. They then proceed to complete his ruin, both moral and financial, by enticing him into an orgy of self-indulgence, which drives prosperity and contentment (in the form of Welthfull Felycyte) from the Court, and heralds the entrance of Adversity. At this point the vices depart, leaving *Magnyfycence* prey to Poverté, Dyspare and the suicidal promptings of Myschefe. He is only saved from self-destruction by the arrival of Good Hope, Perseveraunce and Redresse, who lead him to realize the foolishness of his earlier behavior and educate him in the divine origins of true wisdom. Thus regenerated by his experiences, he returns to the Court accompanied by new, more responsible, companions." Greg Walker: *A Domestic Drama: John Skelton's Magnyfycence and the Royal Household*, in Greg Walker: *Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics and the Court of Henry VIII*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, 60–61.

⁶³ Phoebe S. Spinrad: "Too Much Liberty:" *Measure for Measure* and Skelton's *Magnyfycence*, *Modern Language Quarterly* 60:4 (1999), 433.

⁶⁴ "Such were the rimes of Skelton (vsurping the name of a Poet Laureat) being in deede but a rude rayling rimer & all his doings ridiculous, he vsed both short distaunces and short measures pleasing onely the popular eare: in our courtly maker we banish them vtterly." George Puttenham: *The Arte of English Poesie 1589, A Scolar Press Facsimile*, Menston, The Scolar Press Limited, 1968, 69.

⁶⁵ Walker: *A Domestic Drama*, 62.

⁶⁶ Norland: *Drama*, 175–178.

the play to its didactic function: "A myrrour incleryd is this interlude / This lyfe inconstant for to beholde and se: / Sodenly avaunsyd, and sodenly subdude, / Sodenly ryches, and sodenly poverté, / Sodenly comfort, and sodenly adversyte, / Sodenly thus Fortune can bothe smyle and frowne, / Sodenly set up, and sodenly cast downe."⁶⁷

In case of *The True Chronicle Historie*, the "mirror" metaphor also appears, but not as a reference to the whole play. It becomes a trope embedded in an overtly moralistic context in which the "good" characters refer to one another as if they were the embodied reflections of virtues: Perillus describes Leir as the "myrrour of mild patience;"⁶⁸ Cordella mentions her spouse as "My kingly husband, myrrour of his time"⁶⁹ and the Gallian king calls her "Myrrour of vertue, Phoenix of our age;"⁷⁰ finally, Cordella depicts Perillus, her father's loyal counselor as "Myrrour of vertue and true honesty."⁷¹

The 1608 *King Lear* quarto does not contain such direct allusions to mirrors, yet extratextual evidence relates this play to the "speculum principis" genre. First, to our present knowledge, one of Shakespeare's non-dramatic sources for the story of Lear was the *Mirror for Magistrates*. Obviously, the word "mirror" as it appears in the title of the collection of stories related to the history of the English nation is merely a dead metaphor,⁷² but it nonetheless perfectly fits certain expectations of an era in which chronicles and historical writings could also serve the purpose of offering "a political mirror for those in authority."⁷³ Second, the very fact that the first performance of *King Lear* took place in the royal court at Whitehall on Saint Stephen's Night in 1606 gave grounds for numerous attempts to assess the play's contemporaneous political significance. Even if it seems an unreasonable oversimplification to identify Lear as a literary representation of James I, Shakespeare's play abounds with topical allusions that support such an idea, the summary of which, however, falls beyond the scope of this chapter.

On the other hand, all three plays involved in this contrastive reading show some remoteness from their respective contemporaneous settings, as they present their main characters either as the allegorical figure of the prince (Magnyfycence) or as a king from pre-Christian British history (Leir and Lear). As a result of this distancing, the audience finds these characters less connected to one particular historical person or situation and also sees the

⁶⁷ Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, lines 2517–2523.

⁶⁸ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. C3v.

⁶⁹ Ibid., sig. D4v.

⁷⁰ Ibid., sig. E2v.

⁷¹ Ibid., sig. H4v.

⁷² Herbert Grabes: *The Mutable Glass. Mirror-imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance*, trans. Gordon Collier, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, 19.

⁷³ Lily Bess Campbell: *Poetical Mirrors of History*, in Lily Bess Campbell: *Shakespeare's "Histories": Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy*, London–New York, Routledge, 2004 [1947], 106.

monarch's personal struggle as part of a political one.⁷⁴ This idea is perfectly compatible with the Renaissance idea that dramatic works, tragedies in particular, were attributed moral and political force. As Sir Philip Sidney explains in his *Apology for Poetry*, which was published in 1595, while comedies aim to display "an imitation of the common errors of our life," tragedies are meant to reveal social and political issues when they represent a diseased body politic on stage with an overtly didactic purpose: "the high and excellent Tragedy, that openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours; that with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded."⁷⁵

In his translation of Cicero's *De Officiis*, which was published in English in 1606 under the title *Foure bookes of offices enabling privat persons for the speciall seruice of all good princes and policies*, Barnabe Barnes, one of Shakespeare's fellow dramatists, also explains why people should read the "histories," of the states and lives of princes of old times:

The interior goodnesse and bountie (which accompanieth him) is decently garnished with temperance, innocencie, faithfulness, gentleness, humanitie, prudence, and foresight; requiring a vertuous circumspection and doubt, as in not committing any thing to the wheele of fortune, but vpon ineuitable necessitie, least his actions be racked vpon it, as hath beene found in diuers captaines, which by the like temeritie fell downe, when they with all their forces leaned vpon her wheele.⁷⁶

It is no surprise that both Skelton's and Shakespeare's playtext provide ample allusions to the same wheel of Fortune (*rota Fortune*), a conventional trope of the "fall of princes" tradition representing the unpredictability of human life. In *Magnyfycence*, Poverty warns the monarch: "Syr remembre the tourne of fortunes whele / That wantonly can wynke and wynche with her hele / Nowe she wyll laughe; forthwith she wyll frowne / Sodenly set vp and sodenly pluckyd downe."⁷⁷ In *King Lear*, it is Kent who first recalls this image when he is sitting in the stocks: "Fortune goodnight, / Smile, once more turne thy wheele;"⁷⁸ but later Edmund, having lost all his power, also alludes to the wheel

⁷⁴ Walker: *A Domestic Drama*, 93.

⁷⁵ Sir Philip Sidney: "An Apology for Poetry." *English Critical Texts*, ed. F. Enright – L. Chickera, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962, 31–32.

⁷⁶ Barnabe Barnes: *Foure bookes of offices enabling privat persons for the speciall seruice of all good princes and policies*, London, Printed at the charges of George Bishop, T. Adams, and C. Burbie, 1606. 169 B.

⁷⁷ Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, lines 2056–2059.

⁷⁸ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. E3r.

in this sense: "the wheele is come full circled I am heere."⁷⁹ Thus in line with Sidney's and Cicero's description of the function of tragic stories about princes, I claim that the plays epitomize the theatrical understanding of "mirrors of governance," a term which in this case is not used as a generic label but rather as a metaphor describing an assumed Early Modern interpretive attitude which promoted theoretical thinking.

Through the lens of character criticism, which studies literary characters "as individuals worthy of close scrutiny and strong feelings of identification,"⁸⁰ one might argue that the protagonists of all three plays develop by having similar experiences. Because they fall for the flattery of morally evil characters, these monarchs lose their royal dignity and wealth and end up as beggars, only to realize their own folly. After they recognize their failures, some sort of recovery takes place, which means the full restoration to power in *Magnyfycence* and *The Chronicle Historie* but only a temporary improvement in the mental state of the monarch in the case of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. In this respect, the most significant difference between the three characters is that the stories of *Magnyfycence* and *Leir* have a happy outcome, whereas *Lear* dies in the end. This feature makes *King Lear* a tragic work in the Early Modern sense, because it tells a story of an illustrious person whose fate turned from prosperity to misfortune, which finally leads to his death, or in Puttenham's wording, it sets forth "the dolefull falles of infortunate & afflicted Princes."⁸¹

Nevertheless, in all the three plays, the main reason for the change in the monarchs' fortunes is that they are taken in by flattery. In Aristotelian terms, this tragic mistake is called "hamartia" (*Poetics* 1453a10/15) or the "tragic error," meaning "a wrong action committed in ignorance of its nature, effect etc., which is the starting point of causally connected train of events ending in disaster."⁸² However, the three plays differ significantly in the manner in which they present the various forms of flattery ultimately leading to the protagonist's fall from power.

In *Magnyfycence*, the first example of the deceptive force of flattery comes just after the entrance of the allegorical figure of Fansy, who in the guise of Largess overtly praises the monarch's nobility⁸³ and gains entrance into the royal palace as a sign of having been taken into his *Magnyfycence*'s good graces. Then Crafty Conveyance overtly reveals his intentions to the audience by saying, "Full moche flattery and falsehode I hyde / And by crafty

⁷⁹ Ibid., sig. L2r.

⁸⁰ Christy Desmet: Character Criticism, in Stanley Wells – Lena Cowen Orlin (eds.): *Shakespeare. An Oxford Guide*, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2003, 351.

⁸¹ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 20.

⁸² Jan Marteen Bremer's explanation of the term is quoted in Derek N.C. Wood: Aristotle and Milton's *Poetics*, in Heinrich F. Plett (ed.): *Renaissance-Poetik*, Berlin–New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1994, 369.

⁸³ Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, lines 375–384.

conueyaunce I wyll and I can / Saue a stronge thefe and hange a trew man.”⁸⁴ Later, Courtly Abusion, disguised as Pleasure, with the help of a crafty yet polished description of a beautiful mistress⁸⁵ encourages Magnyfycence to follow his “lust and lykyng,”⁸⁶ which lays the ground for Cloaked Collusion (Sober Sadness) to gain control of the king’s wealth by expelling Measure from the royal court.⁸⁷ Moreover, Redress ultimately summarizes the moral of the play to the audience as “it be regystryd well in memory / A playne example of worldly vaynglory / Howe in this worlde there is no sekernesne / But fallyble flattery enmyxyd with bytternesse.”⁸⁸

In the *True Chronicle Historie*, flattery manifestly becomes the means of wreaking vengeance. When Skallinger informs Gonorill and Ragan, bitterly jealous of their virtuous sister, that their father is planning to make his daughters confess how much they love him in order to force the suitor of his choice on Cordella, Gonorill immediately realizes how to take advantage of Leir’s secret plan: “our revenge we will inflict on her, / Shall be accounted piety in us: / I will so flatter with my doting father, / As he was ne’re so flattered in his life.”⁸⁹ However, what makes the love contest scene peculiar from a poetical point of view is how differently Leir and Cordella react to the elder sisters’ adulation. Listening to Gonorill’s words, Leir responds, “O, how thy words revive my dying soule!” while Cordelia says, “O, how I do abhorre this flattery!”⁹⁰ Also, Leir welcomes Ragan’s sugarcoated lines, “Did never Philomel sing so sweet a note,” which is in sharp contrast with Cordelia’s comment, “Did never flatterer tell so false a tale.”⁹¹ The tension between the parallelism of syntactic elements expressed by the isocolon and the contrast in the ways in which they are interpreted anticipates the conflict over understanding Cordella’s confession: “I cannot paynt my duty forth in words, / I hope my deeds shall make report for me.”⁹² When her sisters and Leir accuse her of pride, Cordella asks them not to misunderstand her plain words, since her tongue “was never usde to flattery.”⁹³ When Gonorill’s and Ragan’s deceitful conduct becomes obvious, Skalliger recognizes the mistake the king made and at the same time tries to excuse himself for his role in the scheme against Leir by confronting Gonorill: “Go, viperous woman, shame to all thy sexe: / The heavens, no doubt, will punish thee for this: / And me a villayne, that to curry favour, / Have given the daughter

⁸⁴ Ibid., lines 1379–1381.

⁸⁵ Ibid., lines 1569–1583.

⁸⁶ Ibid., line 1632.

⁸⁷ Ibid., lines 1658–1755.

⁸⁸ Ibid., lines 2552–2555.

⁸⁹ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, A4r.

⁹⁰ Ibid., sig. B1r.

⁹¹ Ibid., sig. B1v.

⁹² Ibid., sig. B1v.

⁹³ Ibid., sig. B2r.

counsell 'gainst the father. But us the world doth this experience give, / That he that cannot flatter, cannot live."⁹⁴ Ioppolo finds the doubling of similar action an essential element in the dramaturgy of the *True Chronicle Historie*. As she explains, "words, images, and actions are mirrored in every set of two scenes [...] creating dramatically effective binary opposition,"⁹⁵ and it seems reasonable to add that this contrast also applies to the character of the king's two counselors. Unlike Skalliger, Perillus manifests his loyalty to the king not by seeking his liking but by giving him impartial and rational advice. At the very beginning of the play, he warns Leir against the dangers of the cunning love contest, and later, as the only character present when Leir asks how much his daughters love him, he comments on this conversation: "Oh, how I grieve, to see my Lord thus fond, / To dote so much upon vayne flattering words. / Ah, if he but with good advice had weyghed, / The hidden tenure of her humble speech, / Reason to rage should not have given place, / Nor poore Cordella suffer such disgrace."⁹⁶ Moreover, he tries to comfort Leir, who has already realized that Gonorill deceived him, with the following words: "What's got by flattery, doth not long indure; / And men in favour live not most secure."⁹⁷ This comment is remarkably similar to the one with which Redress addressed the audience in Skelton's play.

As for the presentation of flatterers, *King Lear* diverges from the other two plays in many respects. First, unlike in *The True Chronicle Historie*, the daughters' avowal of their love for their father does not take place within the context of a private conversation between the members of the royal family, but rather is part of a public ceremony during which the king announces his decision concerning the future of his kingdom and his daughters. Second, Gonorill and Regan do not reveal their deceitful intentions directly to the audience, like the allegorical figures of the interlude or Gonorill and Ragan in the anonymous play do, and only as the plot unfolds does it become evident that they were in fact merely speaking empty words of flattery. However, Shakespeare anticipates this unexpected turn of events with the delicate use of figures of speech, a poetic technique which is comprehensible even today with the help of contemporaneous books on rhetoric. The second chapter of this book will study Shakespeare's rhetorical knowledge in detail, but it is worth citing one particular example at this point. As a reply to Lear's question which of his daughters loves him the most, Gonorill and Regan in their courtly speech draw on a storehouse of rhetorical figures, for instance repeated parallelism and asyndeton, but first and foremost hyperbole.⁹⁸ The marked presence of

⁹⁴ Ibid., sig. C4v.

⁹⁵ Ioppolo: A Jointure, 172.

⁹⁶ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. B2v–B2r.

⁹⁷ Ibid., sig. D1v.

⁹⁸ Craig Kallendorf: *King Lear* and the Figures of Speech, in Craig Kallendorf (ed.): *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric and Literature*, Mahwah, NJ, Hermagoras Press, 1999, 102–103.

this latter figure is significant with regards to the preconceptions it might have called to the mind of a rhetorically well-trained Early Modern audience. In his *Arte of English Poesie*, a manual which scholars agree Shakespeare must have known,⁹⁹ Puttenham calls this figure the “lowd lyer” and defines it as a false utterance which everybody recognizes as untrue, and he cites an occasion when a speaker at a public event started enumerating Henry VIII’s virtues by applying the figure of hyperbole beyond measure, but a “graue and wise Counsellour made the speaker to be accompted a grosse flattering foole.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, the hyperbole in the elder daughters’ professions of love carries the optionally subliminal message to the contemporaneous audience that an act of flattery is being performed even before Kent calls it by this name in the following sentence: “Think’st thou that dutie / Shall haue dread to speake, when power to flatterie bowes.”¹⁰¹ All in all, what makes Shakespeare’s handling of flattery outstanding and more subtle than his predecessors’ is that in *King Lear* false adulation cannot only be traced by the characters’ deeds and wording but also by the rhetorical implications of their diction.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF CHARACTERS: THE GOOD AND THE BAD, AND THE ROLE OF JESTERS

As far as the moral quality of characters other than the protagonist is concerned, *King Lear* resembles Skelton’s *Magnyfycence* more than *The Chronicle Historie*, since the dramatis personae can be divided into two distinct, sharply contrasting groups. One of them comprises “the good,” or, to recall Bradley’s wording, the representatives of “unselfish and devoted love,” and the other is the evil circle of “the hard self-seeking.”¹⁰² In the interlude, the group of the prince’s friends or supporters includes Felicity, Measure, Circumspection, Goodhope, Redress, and Perseverance, whereas the forces against him consist of Fanny and his brother Folly, the four court vices (Counterfeit Countenance, Crafty Conveyance, Cloaked Collusion, and Courtly Abusion), and after the monarch realizes his error of judgment, Adversity, Poverty, Despair, and Mischief also join the latter group. In Shakespeare’s play, Lear’s royal dignity is attacked by Regan, Gonorill, Cornwall, Edmund, and Oswald, but Cordelia, Kent, Gloster, the Fool, Edgar, and his train of knights protect him. Yet in both Skelton’s and Shakespeare’s play, there is an exception to this bipolar division. In the interlude, Liberty takes different sides based on the circumstances:

⁹⁹ Stuart Gillespie: *Shakespeare’s Books*, *Athlone Shakespeare Dictionary Series*, London–New Brunswick, NJ, Athlone, 2001, 438–440.

¹⁰⁰ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 160.

¹⁰¹ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. B3r.

¹⁰² Bradley: *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 226.

"For I am a vertue yf I be well vsed / And I am a vyce where I am abused."¹⁰³ In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the exception is Albany, who at the beginning of the play seems to side with Lear's enemies, but when he realizes how corrupt Gonorill is,¹⁰⁴ he joins the other group.

Although in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the characters do not become entirely allegorical figures, or in other words, their metaphorical traits do not cover all aspects of their dramatic personae as they do in the interlude, the fact that virtues and vices become distinctive and even verbally assigned attributes of certain characters gives textual or intrinsic evidence to support the relevance of a moralist analogy. For example, the King of France welcomes Cordelia after her father banishes her with the following words: "Thee and thy *virtues* I ceaze vpon,"¹⁰⁵ while Edgar greets Gonorill's servant, Oswald, by saying, "I know thee well, a seruiceable villaine, / As dutious to the *vices* of thy mistres, as badnes would desire."¹⁰⁶ This sharp moral contrast is even more remarkable in the case of Edgar and Edmund who, regardless of the disguise they take, become embodiments of virtue and vice, a quality they keep throughout the play. Moreover, the delicate use of imagery sustains the tension between these moral qualities and their actual representation. When Edmund gives the fake letter to his father to make him suspicious of Edgar's intentions, he stirs his imagination by saying: "I hope for my brother's iustification, he wrot this but as an essay or tast of my virtue."¹⁰⁷ The deceitfully virtuous impression he creates by adopting a language that does not correspond to his deeds is also reinforced by other characters. After he claims to have saved his father's life from Edgar's attempt to kill him, the Duke of Cornwall expresses his gratitude by saying, "for you Edmund, whose vertue and obedience, doth this instant so much commend it self, you shall bee ours, natures of such deepe trust, wee shall much need you, we first seize on."¹⁰⁸ The two brothers' behavior seems to owe much to the representation of morality play characters, as Edmund, the virtue-like vice, and Edgar, the vice-like virtue, exemplify that evil is the reverse of good. Talking about *Magnyfycence*, Bevington offers the following explanation for this dramaturgical tool: "the individual actors, like the plays themselves, embody this antithesis, oscillating between straight and character parts, normality and excess, the believable and the absurd."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, lines 2135–2136.

¹⁰⁴ Cf.: "See thy selfedeuill, proper deformity seemes not in the fiend, so horid as in woman. [...] how ere thou art a fiend, A womans shape doth shield thee." Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. H4r.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., sig. B4r.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., sig. K1r.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., sig. C1v.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. sig. D4v.

¹⁰⁹ David M. Bevington: The Pioneering Contributions of Bale and Skelton, in David M. Bevington (ed.): *From Mankind to Marlowe. Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1962, 136–137.

Unlike in the other two plays, it would be very difficult to contrast so sharply the characters of *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir*, although this binary opposition is quite evident in the case of Leir's daughters and two counselors, Perillus and Skalliger. Yet some of them, including the Gallian king's servant Mumford, the Mariners, and the Watchmen, do not show either good or bad moral qualities or any loyalty towards the king on the basis of which one could add them to either of the groups. They appear mainly for the sake of entertainment, and they remain rather indifferent to the question of governance and the legacy of royal power, and thus they hardly have any didactic function.

Among the *dramatis personae*, however, the role of court jesters¹¹⁰ contributes significantly to the moral of the plot, which has been given more than adequate attention in the secondary literature in the case of all the three plays. In *Magnyfycence*, Fany and Foly stand out among the courtly vices with their "comic dimension,"¹¹¹ and they also manifest jester-like qualities. First, as Happé argues, they wear the attire and have the accessories of fools: the stage directions specify that, when he first comes on stage, Foly is holding a bauble in his hands,¹¹² and such a baton was the traditional property of jesters. Similarly, Fany appears in a fool's costume,¹¹³ as Foly's greeting reveals: "What frantyke Fany, in a foles case?"¹¹⁴ Moreover, Foly also possesses a book to which he refers as his bible to help him teach others how to behave like fools: "Fyrst I lay before them my bybyll, / And teche them howe they sholde syt ydyll, / To pyke theyr fyngers all the day longe; / So in theyr eyre I synge them a songe / And make them so longe to muse / That some of them renneth strayght to the stuse."¹¹⁵ Second, they also find plenty of occasions for sheer entertainment, for example Foly's extensive use of distorted proverbs, which turns his diction into nonsense to which Happé refers as "proverbial topsy-turveydom."¹¹⁶

Mary, I pray God your mastershpy to save. / I shall gyve you a gaude of a goslynge
that I gave, / The gander and the gose both grasyng on one grave. / Than Rowlande
the reve ran, and I began to rave, / And with a bristell of a bore his berde dyd I shave.
[...] Sym Sadyglose was my syer, and Dawcocke my dame. / I coude, and I lyst, garre

¹¹⁰ The term itself derives from Beatrice K. Otto's comprehensive study and refers to a character that embodies the fool as both a courtier and an entertainer. C.f. Beatrice K. Otto: *Facets of the Fool*, in Beatrice K. Otto: *Fools are everywhere: the court jester around the world*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001, 1–46.

¹¹¹ Norland: *Drama*, 183.

¹¹² "Hic ingrediatur Foly qu(at)iendo crema et faciendo Multum, feriendo tabulas, et similia." Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, line 1042.

¹¹³ Peter Happé: Fany and Foly: the Drama of Fools in *Magnyfycence*, *Comparative Drama* 27:4 (1994), 434.

¹¹⁴ Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, line 1044.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, lines 1218–1224.

¹¹⁶ Happé: Fany and Foly, 437.

you laughe at a game, / Howe a wodcocke wrastled with a larke that was lame: / The bytter sayd boldly that they were to blame; / The feldfare wolde have fydded, and it wolde not frame; / The crane and the curlewe therat gan to grame; / The snyte snyveled in the snowte and smyled at the game.¹¹⁷

This passage is in fact an excerpt from Foly's dialogue with Magnyfycence and, according to Happé, the fact that the protagonist is captivated with Foly's foolish language clearly indicates that the allegorical prince himself becomes a fool.¹¹⁸ Third, alongside their highly entertaining verbal exchanges, Folsy and Foly also perform stage tricks, the most memorable of which is when Foly pretends to take a louse from Crafty Conveyance's coat, a ploy that eventually makes his victim undress.¹¹⁹ On the whole, Happé concludes that Skelton's use of the jester figure differs from the Erasmian idea of the holy fool whose folly would provide a "blessed insight into truth"¹²⁰ because in *Magnyfycence* Folsy and Foly function to "articulate moral and philosophical concepts and are carried forward by the author as a means of expressing the nature of folly and evil in the play."¹²¹ Nevertheless, taking a social point of view, David Wiles remarks that Skelton's two jesters are presented as social climbers, who, alongside the serving as characters who embody vice, also become household servants,¹²² which is perfectly in line with Beatrice K. Otto's idea of the court jester mentioned above.

In *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir*, there are some predominantly comic characters, including Mumford, the Gallian king's companion. Their arrival in Britain in the guise of pilgrims, for instance, provides occasion for a humorously clumsy conversation. Although Mumford's verbal utterances are not as elaborately amusing as Foly's in *Magnyfycence*, by the end of the passage he gains the telling pseudo name of "Jack":

Mum. My Lord, how do you brook this Brittish ayre?

King. My Lord ? I told you of this foolish humour,
And bound you to the contrary, you know.

Mum. Pardon me for once, my Lord; I did forget.

King. My Lord agayne ? then let's have nothing else,
And so be tane for spyes, and then tis well.

¹¹⁷ Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, lines 1826–1830; 1832–1838.

¹¹⁸ Peter Happé: Allegorical Kings as Staged by Skelton and Lindsay, in Peter Happé (ed.): *Tudor Theatre. Allegory in the Theatre. L'allégorie au theater*, Collection Theta, Volume 5., Bern, Peter Lang, 2000, 80.

¹¹⁹ Happé: Folsy and Foly, 435.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 445.

¹²¹ Ibid., 440.

¹²² David Wiles: The Vice: from Mankind to the Merchant of Venice, in David Wiles: *Shakespeare's clown: actor and text in the Elizabethan playhouse*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, 3–4.

Mum. Swounds, I could bite my tounge in two for anger:

For Gods sake name your selfe some proper name.

King: Call me *Tresillus*: Ile call thee *Denapoll*.

Mum. Might I be made the Monarch of the world,

I could not hit upon these names, I sweare.

King. Then call me *Will*, ile call thee *Jacke*.

Mum. Well, be it so, for I have wel deserv'd to be cal'd *Jack*.¹²³

As the OED explains, “Jack” in the late sixteenth early seventeenth centuries denoted “a man of the common people; a lad, fellow, chap; esp. a low-bred or ill-mannered fellow, a ‘knave.’”¹²⁴ Thus, Mumford’s pseudonym refers to his lower-class origin on the one hand, yet as the explanation for the phrase “play the jack” shows, this word is also associated with the idea of doing tricks. Moreover, the dual meaning of this name becomes theatrically embodied in the character of Falstaff, both a clown and a vice figure, who in Shakespeare’s Lancastrian tetralogy is often called “Jack.”¹²⁵

In addition to Mumford, the character of the Messenger is also worth mentioning. Ragan hires him to kill Leir, but instead of a murderer he turns out to be a caricature of the hesitant, unprofessional killer.¹²⁶ Moreover, even the moment when Leir wakes up and confronts his murderer turns into an instance of “comic indignation, and a joke for the English audience at French expense”:¹²⁷ “*Leir.* Camst thou from France, of purpose to do this? *Mes.* From France? zoones, do I looke like a Frenchman? / Sure I have not mine owne face on; some body hath chang’d faces / with me, and I know not of it: But I am sure, my apparell is all / English. Sirra, what meanest thou to aske that question?”¹²⁸

As Ioppolo observes, the main function of such comic elements in the anonymous play is to “deconstruct anything taken too seriously or tragically.”¹²⁹ Nevertheless, this type of comic relief greatly differs from the folly of the interlude, as foolishness does not manifest itself in the dramatic persona of one particular character who could accompany the protagonist. Moreover, the

¹²³ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. C1v.

¹²⁴ Cf. “Jack, n” John A. Simpson–Edmund S. C. Weiner (eds.): *The Oxford English Dictionary. OED Online*, Oxford University Press, 1989, <http://dictionary.oed.com>, (accessed 15 July 2009).

¹²⁵ Cf. for example Henry V’s claim: “I am no proud Jack, / like Falstaff” (HIV, Part I. 2.4.995–996) or Falstaff’s rhetorical question “what should poor Jack / Falstaff do in the days of villany?” (HIV, Part I. 3.3.2174–2175) My citations are from the following edition of the play: William Shakespeare: *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works. Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, David Scott Kastan, London, Cengage Learning EMEA, 2000.

¹²⁶ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. F1r.

¹²⁷ Ioppolo: A Jointure, 175.

¹²⁸ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. F2v.

¹²⁹ Ioppolo: A Jointure, 174.

anonymous play does not really display any close connection between wisdom and folly, which would ultimately contribute to the protagonist's recognition of his own hamartia.

Twentieth-century Shakespeare criticism has thoroughly explored the dramatic function of the Fool in general and the possible adaptations of this role by Robert Armin, the official fool of Shakespeare's company in particular. A detailed discussion of this would digress too far from the main focus of my contrastive textual analysis. Regarding the literary antecedents of this character, Enid Welsford explains that a direct connection can be traced between Shakespeare's representation of the court jester as the "sage-fool"¹³⁰ with Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, a grammar school text book with which Shakespeare must have been familiar.¹³¹ The sage fool thus partly stands for "the truth teller whose real insight was thinly disguised as a form of insanity,"¹³² but he is also supposed "to emphasize one peculiarly dreadful instance of the reversal of position between the wise and the fool."¹³³ His main theatrical function provides a direct tie between the audience and the stage and entitles him to the role of a social critic, a feature to which Gonorill refers when calling him Lear's "all-licenc'd foole."¹³⁴

Elaborating on Enid Welsford's idea of the Erasmian connection, John X. Evans further refines the notion of folly in *King Lear* and argues that it is ultimately understood as a virtue that defines authentic Christianity,¹³⁵ and even direct intertextual links can be detected between Shakespeare's and Erasmus' work. Evans' main focus is not the Fool but Cordelia, whose strong moral determination represents the Erasmian idea of "pious folly,"¹³⁶ which aims to eliminate mundane desires and intermediate feelings like filial love and maintains a direct connection with the "highest good."¹³⁷ Thus Cordelia becomes a Christ-figure whose task is to redeem her father from his folly, an idea which is supported by the similarity between her words and behavior and some Biblical passages. To single out an example which has become a bit of a commonplace in the secondary literature on *King Lear*, Evans notes the resemblance between Cordelia's refusal to answer her father's question

¹³⁰ Enid Welsford: *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*, Gloucester, MA, Peter Smith, 1966, 256.

¹³¹ T. W. Baldwin: *Shakespeare's Small Latin and Less Greek*, Vol. I., Urbana, Illinois University Press, 1944, 436.

¹³² Welsford: *The Fool*, 248.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹³⁴ Shakespeare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. D1v.

¹³⁵ John X Evans: Erasmian Folly and Shakespeare's *King Lear*: A Study in Humanist Intertextuality, *Moreana* 27:103 (1990), 4.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

regarding how much she loves him and the following passage in the Old Testament: "The heart of fools is in their mouth: but the mouth of the wise is in their heart" (*Ecclesiasticus* 21:26).¹³⁸

In contrast with Fanny and Folly in *Magnificence*, Lear's Fool as a court jester does not display negative moral qualities, even if he strongly resembles their function as both a courtier and an entertainer. There is some direct textual evidence to prove that his appearance manifests his dramatic role as a jester. While talking to Lear, he refers to don his coxcomb, the cap of a professional fool,¹³⁹ which he actually offers to Kent saying: "why this fellow hath banisht two / on's daughters, and done the third a blessing against his will, if / thou follow him, thou must needs weare my coxcomb."¹⁴⁰ Moreover, the wording of the 1608 Quarto also makes it clear that he is even dressed in motley, the costume of the jester: "That Lord that counsaile'd thee to giue away thy land, / Come place him heere by mee, doe thou for him stand, / The sweet and bitter foole will presently appeare, / The one in motley here, the other found out there."¹⁴¹ These two passages also show that he fulfills an interpretive function as the king's close companion by referring both to himself and Lear as a fool.

As an entertainer, the Fool keeps singing songs. Indeed, at one point, Lear even asks him, "When were you wont to be so full of songs sirra?"¹⁴² Like Folly, the Fool's lines abound with distorted proverbs, riddles, and puns, but unlike the comic characters in *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir*, the Fool contributes to the protagonist's moral development and Lear's recognition of his own folly. First, he boldly and rather unmannerly calls Lear a fool, explaining, "All thy other Titles thou hast giuen away, that thou wast borne with."¹⁴³ Yet, despite his audacity, the Fool remains by Lear's side even in the storm, and although he is using figurative language, his utterance is based on rational arguments to protect Lear in the midst of his madness: "O Nunckle, Court holly water in a drie house / Is better then this raine water out a doore, / Good Nunckle in, and aske why thy daughters blessing, / Heers a night pities nether wise man nor foole."¹⁴⁴ Given his constant presence by Lear's side, many critics have claimed that the fact that the Fool leaves the stage unnoticeably constitutes a major flaw in the play. Enid Welsford, however, offers a reasonable excuse for this departure:

¹³⁸ Ibid., 14.

¹³⁹ For the entry for "coxcomb," the OED quotes a passage from a contemporaneous source, namely Edwards Webbe's *The rare and most wonderfull things which E. Webbe hath seene in his traviles* 1590, which describes a fool's clothing as: "With a fooles coate on my backe, halfe blew, half yellowe, and a cokescombe with three bells on my head." See: "coxcomb" in Simpson-Weiner: *The Oxford English Dictionary*, n.p.n.

¹⁴⁰ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. C4v.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., sig. C4v.

¹⁴² Ibid., sig. D1r.

¹⁴³ Ibid., sig. C4v-D1r.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., sig. F4r.

From the realistic point of view it is no doubt a dramatic flaw that Shakespeare does not account more clearly for the fate of the real man in motley; but his disappearance was a poetic necessity, for the King having lost everything, including his wits, has now himself become the Fool. He has touched bottom, he is an outcast from society, he has no longer any private axe to grind, so he now sees and speaks the truth.¹⁴⁵

RECURRING DRAMATURGICAL ELEMENTS

Having examined and contrasted the three texts, I have found several dramaturgical elements which they share, but which are arranged in diverse patterns. These elements or motifs, which include letters, disguises, meetings with beggars, suicide attempts, recoveries, have a significant role in structuring the events of plot, and thus, they contribute to the main character's moral development. In what follows, this chapter discusses the appearance and function of these elements, letters and visual and verbal disguises in particular, in order to highlight more of the macrostructural similarities and differences among the three playtexts.

Letters

Even on the Early Modern stage, letters were conventional dramatic elements that served to develop and complicate the plot. In *Magnyfycence*, there is only one letter, but it is significant. It is a letter that Fansy (Largess) hands over to the protagonist, saying that his friend Sad Circumspection has sent it.¹⁴⁶ Although Magnyfycence is suspicious about the letter, which is in fact a forgery, the dramatic moment when Fansy hands it over to Magnyfycence provides a perfect occasion for Fansy to give a detailed description of the journey he needed to take in order to deliver it. Fansy's smooth flow of speech persuades Magnyfycence that the letter is authentic, and he puts his trust in the newcomer, a mistake which clearly signals his grave error in judgment. Nevertheless, from a dramaturgical point of view, this letter remains a prop the contents of which is never disclosed. The dramatic moment, however, perfectly fits into a common pattern in Tudor drama, in which letters, having been "stolen, lost, forged, opened without permission or read by the wrong person," are meant to signal some sort of disruption.¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, Happé remarks that the very act of forging letters is a typical attribute of vice

¹⁴⁵ Welsford: *The Fool*, 266.

¹⁴⁶ Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, lines 326–340.

¹⁴⁷ Alan Stewart: *Shakespeare's Letters*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, 19.

characters like Fansy,¹⁴⁸ who actually stays by the addressee's side when he is reading the letter and thus influences the way in which it will be interpreted.

In the *Chronicle Historie*, five stage letters appear, none of which is read aloud on stage. Nevertheless, they can be divided into two groups, the first of which contains the three that simply carry messages between characters, especially the members of the royal family, and arrive safely in the hands of the person to whom they are addressed. The suitors of the elder sisters visit the royal court in response to the king's invitation or, to use Leir's words, his "letters of contract,"¹⁴⁹ in which the king offers the King of Cambria and the King of Cornwall his elder daughters' hands in marriage. Having married Cordella, the King of Gallia also sends a letter of invitation to Leir, and the Ambassador delivering the message rejects both Gonorill's and Ragan's falsehearted attempt to read it.¹⁵⁰ The letters in the second group are not simple messages, but rather are tools of deceit, like the one in *Magnyfycence*, which serve the elder daughters' selfish goal of seizing their father's royal power. First, Gonorill bribes a messenger and replaces the letter written to Leir by her brother-in-law, the King of Cambria, with a forged letter which provokes strife between her father and Ragan.¹⁵¹ This replacement becomes significant, because it results in the delivery of a deadly letter ordering Leir's execution. When she receives the forged letter, Ragan hires the same messenger and gives him another letter, in which she orders him to kill her father. Moreover, she also gives the messenger instructions: "But yet, before thou prosecute the act, / Shew him the letter, which my sister sent, / There let him read his owne inditement first, / And then proceed to execution."¹⁵² But the Messenger gives Leir Ragan's letter contracting him to kill him,¹⁵³ and Leir and Perillus eventually use this letter when they confront her. Although Ragan rejects the accusation that she and Gonorill were seeking their father's death and even tears the forged letter, this object becomes factual evidence to prove publicly that Ragan is lying.¹⁵⁴

King Lear's audience also witnesses a remarkable abundance of "epistolary transactions." In fact, in the Shakespeare oeuvre, *King Lear* provides the

¹⁴⁸ Happé: *Allegorical Kings*, 79.

¹⁴⁹ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. B4v.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., sig. E4r and sig. G3v.

¹⁵¹ "Instead of carrying / the Kings letters to my father, carry thou these letters to my / sister, which contayne matter quite contrary to the other: there / shal she be giuen to vnderstand, that my father hath detracted / her, giuen out slaundrous speeches against her; and that hee / hath most intollerably abused me, set my Lord and me at va/riance, and made mutinyes amongst the commons. / These things (although it be not so) / Yet thou must affirme them to be true, / With othes and protestations as will serue, / To driue my sister out of love with him, / And cause my will accomplished to be." Ibid., sig. D3v.

¹⁵² Ibid., sig. E3v.

¹⁵³ Ibid., sig. F3v–F4r.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., sig. I3v–I4r.

highest number of letters. According to the Shakespeare concordance, the word letter occurs thirty-three times in the play,¹⁵⁵ and alongside the numerous messages and exchanges of news, eight stage letters appear, two of which are read aloud.¹⁵⁶ From a historical approach, this feature could obviously draw attention to the importance and role of correspondence in Jacobean England, though most of these messages in the play have hardly anything to do with the Erasmian idea of letter writing.¹⁵⁷ Alan Stewart remarks that the only letter that perfectly meets the Erasmian idea of the familiar epistle is the one that Kent sends to Cordelia.¹⁵⁸ According to the Renaissance notion of epistolary writing, letters are intended to evoke the reader's empathy with the help of the text, which stands for the person *in absentia*, a criterium that Kent's letter seems to fulfill, since the carrier of the letter called Gentleman lengthily describes Cordelia's highly intensified reactions in the following manner:

Gent. I say she tooke them, read them in my presence, / And now and then an ample teare trild downe / Her delicate cheekes, it seemed she was a queene ouer her passion, / Who most rebell-like, sought to be King ore her.

Kent. O then it moued her.

Gent. Not to a rage, patience and sorow streme, / Who should expresse her goodliest you haue seene, / Sun shine and raine at once, her smiles and teares, / Were like a better way those happie smilets, / That playd on her ripe lip seeme not to know, / What guests were in her eyes which parted thence, / As pearles from diamonds dropt in briefe, / Sorow would be a raritie most beloued, / If all could so become it.

Kent. Made she no verball question.

Gent. Faith once or twice she heau'd the name of father, / Pantingly forth as if it prest her heart, / Cried sisters, sisters, shame of Ladies sisters: / *Kent*, father, sisters, what ith storme ith night, / Let pitie not be beleeft there she shooke, / The holy water from her heauenly eyes, / And clamour moystened her, then away she started, / To deale with grieve alone.¹⁵⁹

Nevertheless, Stewart rather plausibly claims that, apart from this exceptional passage, Shakespeare's use of letters does not reflect the Erasmian notion of epistolography, so letters in his drama should be regarded primarily as "material objects,"¹⁶⁰ which make a visual impact. Stewart uses this term to indicate that letters in Shakespearean drama are items of stage property,

¹⁵⁵ Bergeron: *Deadly Letters*, 160.

¹⁵⁶ See the detailed description of all the letters in Stewart: *Shakespeare's Letters*, 194.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. especially *ibid.*, 12–16.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

¹⁵⁹ Shakespeare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. H4v–I1r.

¹⁶⁰ Stewart: *Shakespeare's Letters*, 16.

and they function not as texts, but first and foremost as “objects that move between individuals.”¹⁶¹ On the other hand, the passage cited above also shifts attention from the text of the letter, which in this case is not disclosed, to the significance and complexity of the task of the messenger, who was not simply a carrier, but also reported on the recipient’s reactions and thus contributed to the written correspondence.

Unlike in the case of *Magnyfycence* and the anonymous play, there are two occasions when even the texts of letters are read on stage, and on each occasion, this reading reveals a murder attempt. First, Gloster reads aloud the letter that Edmund forged to make his father believe that Edgar intended to kill him. This scene resembles Fansy’s first meeting with Magnyfycence, since the letter becomes an attribute of a vice character, who remains present and deceitfully influences the process of interpretation:

A Letter.

Glost. This policie of age makes the world bitter to the best / of our times, keepes our fortunes from vs till our oldnes cannot / relish them, I begin to find an idle and fond bondage in the op- / pression of aged tyranny, who swaies not as it hath power, but as / it is suffered, come to me, that of this I may speake more; if our / father would sleepe till I wakt him, you should inioy halfe his / reuenew for euer, and liue the beloued of your brother *Ed-/gar*.¹⁶²

This letter has special significance in the subplot, Stewart argues, because Gloster’s fate seems to be decided by closet letters. First, Edmund alleges that he found this forged letter, which ultimately makes Gloster fall victim to his bastard son’s manipulation, “throwne in at the casement of my closet.”¹⁶³ Later, Cordelia also sends Gloster a letter which he hides in his closet, but to his great regret he also informs Edmund about it, who steals the letter in order to give it to Cornwall as a token of treason, which then leads to Gloster’s blinding on stage. As Stewart concludes, the presence of the letters in the closet thus signals their dangerous nature, yet what makes their misinterpretation and abuse possible is that their messenger is unknown, so there is nobody to answer for their origin.¹⁶⁴

Second, in addition to being the victim of a forgery, Edgar also becomes a special reader as he reads aloud another dangerous letter written by Gonorill in which she urges Edmund to kill her husband, Albany:

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁶² Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. C1v.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, sig. C1v.

¹⁶⁴ Stewart: *Shakespeare’s Letters*, 217–218.

Let your reciprocall vowes bee remembred, you haue many / opportunities to cut him off, if your will want not, time and place / will be fruitfully offered, there is nothing done, If he returne the / conquerour, then am I the prisoner, and his bed my gayle, from / the lothed warmth whereof deliuer me, and supply the place for / your labour, your wife (so I would say) your affectionate seruant / and for you her owne for *Venter, Gonorill*.¹⁶⁵

From a dramaturgical point of view, it is also a deadly letter¹⁶⁶ in every sense of the word, as it urges the Duke of Albany's murder, yet the reader of the letter, Edgar, gains the object itself by killing Oswald, the carrier of the letter, and eventually he also kills its addressee, Edmund. In the end, the letter arrives in Albany's hand, and Albany confronts Gonorill about it before Edgar and Edmund start fighting:

Alb. Saue him, saue him,

Gon. This is meere practise *Gloster* by the law of armes / Thou art not bound to answere an vnknowne opposite, / Thou art not vanquisht, but cousned and beguild,

Alb. Stop your mouth dame, or with this paper shall I stople / it, thou worse then any thing, reade thine owne euill, nay no / tearing Lady, I perceiue you know't.

Gon. Say if I do, the lawes are mine not thine, who shal arraine me for't.

Alb. Most monstrous know'st thou this paper?

Gon. Aske me not what I know.

Exit. Gonorill.

It is worth noting that this scene resonates with the ending of *King Leir*, when Ragan tears the letter she forged, but Shakespeare shifts this familial confrontation scene from the main plot (Leir and his daughter) to the subplot (Albany and Gonorill). This shift supports David Bergeron's claim that in *King Lear*, the letters, as a form of indirect, mediated discourse, mostly appear in the subplot, and this suggests that "Shakespeare has placed an extraordinary reliance on letters in the Gloucester story in order to open up another level of discourse, one in contrast to Lear's."¹⁶⁷ Mark Taylor has a brilliantly original insight about the poetical significance of Gloster's character, which could perfectly complement Bergeron's observation about the differing discourses of the two plotlines. Unlike Lear, who makes his error of judgment based on his daughters' speech, Gloster's misinterpretation is based on written texts, which provides a poetically sensible motivation for the implied meaning of his name and his dramaturgical function. As Taylor explains, the word Gloster

¹⁶⁵ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. K1r-v.

¹⁶⁶ Bergeron: *Deadly Letters*, 171.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

is homophonous with “glossator,” the learned commentator of glosses,¹⁶⁸ or in other words, written texts, and thus, his blinding on stage perfectly symbolizes his failure of proper interpretation and also physically manifests his inability to produce reliable readings. This idea is perfectly in line with the data provided by the OED, making clear that in the seventeenth century, the verb “gloss” already had the meaning “to veil with glosses; to explain away; to read a different sense into.”¹⁶⁹

Verbal and Visual Disguises

Another dramaturgical element that appears in all three plays is the use of elaborate disguises which characters don in order to hide their true intentions or to manipulate others. In *Magnyfycence* the conspirators cunningly conceal their dishonest intentions and replace Felicity, Liberty, and Measure, the prince’s counselors. Technically speaking, this replacement most likely involved changing the actors’ costumes, but the disguises are also verbally marked, since the characters appear with a new name on stage; Fanny as Largesse, Folly as Conceit, Crafty Conveyance as Sure Surveyance, Cloaked Collusion as Sober Sadness, and Courtly Abusion as Pleasure. As Scattergood explains, the disguises and dresses in Skelton’s play fulfill a dramaturgical function, as they draw attention to *Magnyfycence*’s failure as a wise prince in two particular respects. First of all, regardless of the costumes and the name change, *Magnyfycence* should have known that he could not trust Fanny: “Among the commonplaces of that tradition of ‘mirrors for princes’ literature which depends on the secreta secretorum is that the wise prince ought to be skilled in judging the character of men with whom he comes into contact, especially if they are prospective servants, and sometimes this involved an assessment of their appearance – particularly their physiognomies.”¹⁷⁰

Since Fanny is supposed to be a short man,¹⁷¹ he could not credibly act as Largesse, a feature to which even the text of the play alludes:

¹⁶⁸ “‘Glossator’ is a trisyllable, but its second syllable, a schwa, would be inevitably elided in speech so that the word would become virtually indistinguishable in sound from the name of Edgar and Edmund’s father, the Earl of Glossator(s), whose titular preeminence might be supposed, therefore to make him better at what he does.” Mark Taylor: *Letters and Readers in Macbeth, King Lear, and Twelfth Night*, *Philological Quarterly* 69:1 (1990), 41.

¹⁶⁹ Simpson–Weiner: *The Oxford English Dictionary*, n.p.n.

¹⁷⁰ John Scattergood: *Dressing the Part in Magnyfycence: Allegory and Costume*, in Peter Happé (ed.): *Tudor Theatre. Allegory in the Theatre. L’allégorie au théâtre*, Collection Theta, Volume 5., Bern, Peter Lang, 2000, 69.

¹⁷¹ As Counterfet Countenaunce remarks: “A rebellyon agaynst Nature / So large a man, and so lytell of stature!” Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, lines 522–23.

Magnyfycence: And is this credence that I gave to the letter?
 Fansy: Why, coulde not your wyt serve you no better?
 Magnyfycence: Why, who wolde have thought in you suche gyle?
 Fansy: What? Yes, by the rode, syr; it was I all this wyle
 That you trustyd, and Fansy is my name,
 And Foly, my broder, that made you moche game.¹⁷²

The second failure of the prince is that he does not pay careful attention to the clothes of the characters he chooses as the members of his household, even though clothes have a symbolic function. Although Clokyd Colusyon remarks that the fashionable dress worn by Courtly Abusyon has a stale odor, Magnyfycence disregards the comment and accepts Courtly Abusyon into his domestic circles. As John Scattergood argues, the fact that he trusts these characters about whom he hardly knows anything makes his behavior "unintelligent and uncircumspect [...] without due regard for his financial well-being, status, and repute."¹⁷³

In the anonymous play, disguises serve the personal purpose of the Gallian king, as he and his attendant put on palmer's costumes to find a wife, but their camouflage does not directly endanger either the person of the king or his country. Their choice to disguise themselves as pilgrims also shows their good intentions, and when they meet Cordella and the Gallian king falls in love with her, he immediately reveals himself and the purpose of his visit: "Ah, deare Cordella, cordiall to my heart, / I am no Palmer, as I seeme to be, / But hither come in this unknowne disguise, / To view th'admired beauty of those eyes."¹⁷⁴

As in the case of letters as a dramatic tool, Shakespeare makes more complex use of disguises. Edmund, for instance, is a character whose disguise is marked not visually, but verbally, and it is only the rhetorical construct of his diction through which his intentions are delicately revealed from the beginning of the play. As Brian Vickers concludes in his careful study of Shakespeare's prose, "Edmund's changes from verse to prose resemble Iago's, for in the scene where he deceives father and brother he begins and ends in verse soliloquies frankly admitting his guile and cynicism to us, while his dissembling intrigue is conducted in prose."¹⁷⁵ Thus, his diction resembles the language of Lear's elder daughters, who were deceiving their father with the help of cunning rhetorical structures, which makes them similar to the vice characters of *Magnyfycence*, even if in *King Lear* this deceit is not accompanied by costume change.

¹⁷² Ibid., lines 1865–1870.

¹⁷³ Scattergood: *Dressing the Part*, 71.

¹⁷⁴ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. C3v.

¹⁷⁵ Brian Vickers: *Tragic Prose: Clowns, Villains, Madmen*, in Brian Vickers: *The Artistry of Shakespeare's Prose*, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1968, 351.

There are, however, two characters in *King Lear* who adopt a both visually and verbally perceivable disguise. Kent and Edgar both appear as poor beggars and thus conceal their identities not only to protect themselves but also to make it possible to stay near the people they love and respect in order to support them, as becomes evident from Kent's speech: "If but as well I other accents borrow, that can my speech defuse, / my good intent may carry through it self so that full issue for which I raz'd my likenes."¹⁷⁶ In his first soliloquy, Edgar also explains his intentions to change his appearance: "my face ile grime with filth, / Blanket my loynes, else all my haire with knots, / And with presented nakedness outface."¹⁷⁷ Obviously, what makes his clothing so unusual is the very lack of clothes and the exposure of nakedness. As for his verbal disguise, Edgar, like Kent and Edmund, also uses prose passages for dissimulation. When they pretend to be someone else, they speak in prose, whereas they always establish direct contact with the audience and reveal their intentions in verse, which is a distinctive feature of Shakespearean characterization.¹⁷⁸ Edgar's diction as Mad Tom has been thoroughly explored, and twenty-first-century Shakespeare scholarship takes it for granted that the playwright's main source for the language of Edgar's demonic possession was Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603),¹⁷⁹ so I do not intend to discuss this in detail. But alongside the role Edgar's distinctive use of language as Mad Tom has in concealing his identity, the character's verbal dissimulation also has the power to prevent his father's suicide attempt, another dramaturgical element that derives from morality plays. After meeting Despair and Mischief, the latter of whom offers the protagonist a knife and a halter, the traditional instruments of suicide,¹⁸⁰ Magnyfycence tries to stab himself, and only Goodhope's intervention prevents him from killing himself.¹⁸¹ Howard Norland describes this element as "a stock response of a sinner who recognizes the consequences of his errors."¹⁸² In *King Lear*, it is not the protagonist but Gloster who, at the cliffs of Dover, intends to cast

¹⁷⁶ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. C3r–C3v.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., sig. E3r.

¹⁷⁸ Vickers: *Tragic Prose*, 352.

¹⁷⁹ The very idea originates from Kenneth Muir's 1951 article "Samuel Harsnett and *King Lear*"; yet it was Stephen Greenblatt's 1985 essay entitled "Shakespeare and the Exorcists" that further refined this connection. Cf.: Kenneth Muir: Samuel Harsnett and *King Lear*, *The Review of English Studies* 2:5 (1951), 11–21; and Stephen Greenblatt: Shakespeare and the Exorcists, in Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (eds.): *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, New York, Methuen, 1985, 163–187.

¹⁸⁰ Scattergood: *Dressing the Part*, 58.

¹⁸¹ "Magnyfycence: Shall I my selfe hang with an halter ? Nay! / Nay, rather wyll I chose to ryd me of this lyve / In styckynge my selfe with this fayre knyffe. Here Magnyfycence wolde slee hymselfe with a knyfe. [...] Good Hope: Alas, dere sone! Sore combed is thy mynde, / Thyselfe that thou wolde sloo agaynst nature and kynde." Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, lines 2318–2324.

¹⁸² Norland: *Drama*, 185.

himself down into the deep, but Edgar makes him believe that he survived the fall.¹⁸³ In this particular context, Gloster's falling on his face on stage yet believing that he was dead and has come back to life has an ironically comic overtone. Nevertheless, the failure of the suicide attempt is completely missing from *The True Chronicle Historie*, which establishes a stronger dramaturgical connection between Skelton's interlude and Shakespeare's *King Lear*. It is also worth pointing out that the protagonist's encounter with beggars is another element that only *Magnyfycence* and *King Lear* have in common. In both plays, this encounter has the dramaturgical function of helping the protagonist realize the mistakes he has made.¹⁸⁴ After meeting Adversity, Magnyfycence faces the allegorical figure of Poverty, and he begins lamenting his folly and "wanton will" (2082-2097), whereas Lear encounters Edgar in the guise of a "Bedlam beggar," and he immediately expresses his regret for not taking care of the poor.¹⁸⁵ A scene in which a monarch meets a beggar on the Early Modern stage epitomizes the complexity of a societal phenomenon that Kinga Földváy convincingly describes in her recent study.¹⁸⁶ The helpful attitude of the rich towards the poor was motivated not only by the Christian principle of charity, but also by the discomfort they felt at the sight of poverty. In a time of rebellion, poor people could easily increase public disturbance, so it is no wonder that by the beginning of the seventeenth century, the treatment of the poor was legally controlled by the 1601 "Elizabethan Poor Law."¹⁸⁷ In *King Lear*, this meeting gains further significance, as it also presents some self-reflective theatrical elements, because the word "Bedlam beggar" does not simply denote an outcast vagabond, but rather specifically refers to an inhabitant of the Bethlem Hospital in London, an institution that provided shelter for the mentally disturbed. In order to raise money to cover the patients' cost of living, the directors of the hospital put the madmen on display in a theatrical setting, providing entertainment for visitors. As Kenneth S. Jackson explains in a recent book, the scene in which Lear meets Edgar on the heath

¹⁸³ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. I2r-I3v.

¹⁸⁴ In contrast to the other plays, in *The True Chronicle Historie*, Leir does not meet a beggar but becomes one. However, his main concern in this situation seems to be the hunger he feels: "Oh, I do faint for want of sustenance: / And thou, I know, in little better case. / No gentle tree affords one taste of fruit, / To comfort us, untill we meet with men." Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. H1v.

¹⁸⁵ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. G1v.

¹⁸⁶ Kinga Földváy: Humanist-Human-Humane? Poverty and Humanitarian Aid in Elizabethan England, in Zsolt Almási – Mike Pincombe (eds.): *Writing the Other: Humanism versus Barbarism in Tudor England*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars, 2008, 216-230.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 222.

“registers most profoundly the common relationship between the stage and the theatrical practices of Bethlem, the hospital’s practice of showing the mad to elicit charity – and the distance between the two.”¹⁸⁸

Facing different adversities and encountering various forms of poverty, in the end, all three monarchs admit their errors of judgment. Leir considers wrath to be the cause of adversities, as the following passage implies: “I like an envious thorne, have prickt the heart, / And turnd sweet Grapes, to sowre unrelisht Sloes: / The causelesse ire of my respectlesse brest, / Hath sowrd the sweet milk of dame Natures paps.”¹⁸⁹ However, in Skelton’s and Shakespeare’s play, not only does the royal hero clearly recognize and publicly admit that his fall is due to his own folly,¹⁹⁰ but this realization, brought about by his experiences as a beggar, is also preceded by some sort of warning from another character, an element that is missing from the anonymous play. For instance, in the interlude, *Circumspection* advises Magnyfycence that “ye of foly in tymes past you repent,”¹⁹¹ and in the opening scene of Shakespeare’s play, Kent excuses his verbal attack on the King by claiming: “To plainnes honours bound when Maiesty stoops to folly.”¹⁹²

In addition to the beggar characters, another character completely missing from the anonymous play but present in the other two is the doctor who provides the monarch with a remedy once he recognizes his own error in judgment. In *Magnyfycence*, Goodhope greets the prince by saying, “Good hope your potecary assygned am,”¹⁹³ and he brings the medicine of repentance and devotion¹⁹⁴ to remind the prince that God’s grace is his real physician.¹⁹⁵ Although the Folio lists him as a “Gentleman,” in the Quarto version of Shakespeare’s play a character called “Doctor” appears to report on the King’s physical condition to Cordelia.¹⁹⁶ Later, Lear asks Gloster to “Giue mee an ounce of Ciuet, good Apothocarie, to sweeten my imagination.”¹⁹⁷ When she returns from France, Cordelia appears as her father’s doctor and brings the remedy to restore him to royal power. She claims, “O my deer father restoratiō

¹⁸⁸ Kenneth S. Jackson: *King Lear and the Search for Bethlem (Bedlam) Hospital*, in Kenneth S. Jackson: *Separate Theaters: Bethlem (“Bedlam”) Hospital and the Shakespearean Stage*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2005, 155.

¹⁸⁹ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. H1r.

¹⁹⁰ At the end of his *ubi sunt* monologue Magnyfycence claims: “Alas, my folly! alas, my wanton will! / I may no more speak, till I have wept my fill.” Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, lines 2060–2061; whereas King Lear cries out the following words of recognition: “O Lear. Lear! Beat at this gate that let thy folly in, and thy deere iudgement out, goe goe, my people?” Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. D2r.

¹⁹¹ Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, line 2472.

¹⁹² Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B3r.

¹⁹³ Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, line 2390.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, lines 2396–97.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, line 2388.

¹⁹⁶ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. I1v.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, sig. I4r.

hang thy medicin on my lips, / And let this kis repaire those violent harmes that my two sisters / Haue in thy reverence made.”¹⁹⁸ When undergoing treatment, the protagonist in both plays receives a new garment as a sign of his recovery. In the moral interlude, Redress presents Magnyfycence with a new “abylyment,”¹⁹⁹ and in *King Lear*, a Gentleman informs Cordelia and Kent that they “put fresh garments” on her father.²⁰⁰ Leir also receives a new dress in *The True Chronicle Historie*, but only because he should pay some fare to the mariners to take him to France, and instead of money, they accept his robe.²⁰¹

The chart below offers a summary of the findings of my contrastive examination of the various dramaturgical elements in the three plays.

	Magnyfycence	King Leir	King Lear
Letters	1 forged letter (content not disclosed)	5 stage letters (content not disclosed) 3 messages 1 replacement of letters: Cornwall's letter to Leir → Gonorill's letter to Ragan Ragan's letter ordering Leir's murder	Several messages 8 stage letters 2 read on stage: - Edmund's forged letter on Edgar's behalf to Gloster - Gonorill's letter to Edmund urging to kill Albany
Disguise	the attribute of courtly vices (visually and verbally marked)	Gallian king and Mumford as pilgrims (visually and verbally marked)	Edmund's disguise (verbally marked) Kent, Edgar as beggars (visually and verbally marked)
Beggars	Magnyfycence meets Poverty	Leir himself becomes a beggar	Lear meets Edgar in the guise of Poor Tom
Suicide Attempt	Mischief gives a knife and halter to Magnyfycence to stab himself	—	comic suicide attempt: Gloster at the cliffs of Dover
Recoveries	Goodhope and Redress bring medicine and a new “abylyment” to Magnyfycence	—	Doctor as a character Cordelia described as a doctor bringing medicine Lear receives “fresh garments”

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., sig. K2r.

¹⁹⁹ Skelton: *Magnyfycence*, line 2444.

²⁰⁰ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. K2r.

²⁰¹ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. G4r.

With the contrastive reading I have offered in this chapter, I have attempted to identify ways in which the 1608 *King Lear* Quarto arguably can be characterized as a playtext which borrows from existing tradition in significant ways, as demonstrated by the relevant similarities between the playtext and the anonymous *True Chronicle Historie of King Leir* and John Skelton's *Magnyfycence*, while, at the same time, it makes innovative and distinctive use of dramaturgical tools found in the two earlier dramas. While the wording of Shakespeare's play resembles and occasionally even echoes that of the anonymous play, the striking number of similarities concerning the macrotextual or dramaturgical elements suggests that a strong connection also exists between the interlude and Shakespeare's play. Some of the most significant links between these two works include the overtly public feature of the monarch's relation to the other characters. The bipolar distribution of the dramatis personae from the perspective of their moral qualities; the crucial role of jesters who help the protagonist recognize his own folly; and the appearance of characters like the doctor bringing medicine and new garments are conventional elements of the "speculum principis" tradition. Although some of these elements also appear in *the True Chronicle Historie of King Leir*, they fulfill a dramatic function which differs from the one that connects *Magnyfycence* to Shakespeare's 1608 version of *King Lear*.

Thus, certain elements of the Shakespearean text most probably derive from the Tudor interlude tradition, and this shows the playwright's familiarity with this dramatic heritage. Obviously, this contrastive reading does not reveal the depths of his knowledge and cannot explain how Shakespeare could have gained this knowledge, but it undoubtedly points out the historical dimension of his dramaturgical practice. After this comprehensive, macrostructural study of the play, the next chapter will focus on a microstructural layer of the text and will contrast two scenes with the rhetorical and poetical conventions of Shakespeare's age.

RHETORICAL AND POETICAL CONVENTIONS: SHAKESPEARE'S ARTE OF POESY IN THE LOVE CONTEST AND THE MOCK TRIAL SCENES

This chapter studies the microtextual layers of the 1608 Quarto in order to gain further insights into Shakespeare's poetic practice as a playwright. In it, I consider how the knowledge twenty-first century readers gain from Early Modern books on rhetorical and poetical conventions could shape our understandings of Shakespeare's compositional skills and methods. The study of Renaissance formal rhetoric and its influence on the contemporaneous practice of drama writing began to attract the attention of literary historians only at the end of the twentieth century. One of the possible reasons for this lack of scholarly interest, as Heinrich F. Plett, mentioned in passing in the introduction, explains, is the fact that the primary texts of sixteenth-century books on rhetoric were republished and thus made accessible only at the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁰² To my knowledge, among the handbooks that scholars on Shakespeare have studied, there is one particular handbook, *The Arte of English Poesie*, that offers an excellent overview of English courtly rhetoric, but it has not received as much academic attention as it would rightly deserve.

Although it was published anonymously by Richard Field in 1589, since the publication of the critical edition of this text in 1936, Puttenham's authorship has rarely been questioned.²⁰³ As the dedication reports, it was written for the entertainment of the members of the royal court: "[...] it was by the Authour intended to our Soueraigne Lady, the Queene, and for her recreation and

²⁰² Heinrich F. Plett gives a comprehensive summary of the influence of the scholarly rediscovery of Renaissance rhetoric on twentieth-century Shakespeare philology in his essay *Shakespeare and the Ars Rhetorica*, published in his book: *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*, Berlin–New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2004, 415–434.

²⁰³ For a detailed discussion of the question, see B. M. Ward: The Authorship of *the Arte of English Poesie*: a suggestion, *The Review of English Studies* 1:3 (1925), 284–308; and also Gladys Doidge Willcock – Alice Walker: Introduction, in George Puttenham: *The Arte of English Poesie*, eds. Gladys Doidge Willcock – Alice Walker, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1936, ix–cx.

seruice chiefly deuised, in which case to make any other person her highnes partener in the honour of his guifts it could not stād with my dutie, nor be without some preiudice to her Maiesties interest and his merrite.”²⁰⁴

Quite naturally, the question arises as to what makes this particular book so different from other Renaissance works on rhetoric, such as Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), Henry Peacham's *Garden of Eloquence* (1577), or Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy* (1595). Moreover, since these books were ultimately modeled on the works of one Roman author, Quintilian, and one Renaissance author, Erasmus, one might even suspect that their discussion and handling of the subject matter cannot be substantively different. Nevertheless, Puttenham's book is outstanding among the works of its kind for his familiarity and commitment to the vernacular literature of his own age, a feature that explains the author's choice of title²⁰⁵ and manifests itself in the numerous examples that he cites from English poets instead of quoting classical authors. As far as the immediate source of his rhetorical terminology is concerned, Puttenham relies mostly on Joannes Susenbrotus' handbook the *Epitome troporum ac schematum* (*An Epitome of Tropes and Schemes*), which achieved enormous success throughout Europe in the first half of the sixteenth century.²⁰⁶ Out of one hundred and twenty-one figures that Puttenham names, one hundred and fifteen correspond exactly to Susenbrotus' terms.²⁰⁷ Yet Puttenham's originality lies in the fact that he tried to establish an English vocabulary for these figures instead of merely listing the Greek or Latin counterparts. In addition to the historic significance of the creation of a vernacular body of the terminology, this unique feature also reflects Puttenham's stand in the contemporaneous debate concerning whether art should be limited to the Classical languages or whether real poetry can also be written in vernacular tongues like English. To cite one of his answers articulated in the form of a rhetorical question: “If againe Art be but a certaine order of rules prescribed by reason, and gathered by experience, why should not Poesie be a vulgar Art with vs aswell as with the Greeks and Latines, our language admitting no fewer rules and nice diuersities then theirs?”²⁰⁸

As for the structure of Puttenham's work, it consists of three books. The first, entitled “Of Poets and Poesie,” discusses theoretical and generic issues and emphasizes that the social and political functions of poets and their art

²⁰⁴ Puttenham: *The Arte*, npn.

²⁰⁵ Willcock – Walker: *Introduction*, lxiii.

²⁰⁶ Wayne A. Rebhorn: “His tail at commandment:” George Puttenham and the Carnivalization of Rhetoric, in Walter Jost–Wendy Olmsted (eds.): *A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004, 99.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 100.

²⁰⁸ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 3.

are strongly intertwined. This idea culminates in his views on Queen Elizabeth who, according to Puttenham, is “the most excellent Poet” for the following reasons:

Forsooth by your Princely purse fauours and countenance, making in maner what ye list, the poore man rich, the lewd well learned, the coward couragious, and vile both noble and valiant. Then for imitation no lesse, your person as a most cunning counterfaior liuely representing *Venus* in countenance, in life *Diana*, *Pallas* for gouernement, and *Iuno* in all honour and regall magnificence.²⁰⁹

The second book, “Of Proportion Poetical,” focuses on more practical matters, such as prosody and the visual effect of a poem’s typographical arrangement. The third book, on which I focus in the major part of this chapter, is entitled “Of Ornament.” It essentially discusses various issues of style. For my argument on the assumed philological connection between Puttenham’s handbook and Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, this third book is of utmost importance, especially for its account of the figures of speech and its lengthy description of proper behavior, the details of which I discuss later.

SHAKESPEARE AND *THE ARTE OF ENGLISH POESIE*

The idea of relating *The Arte of English Poesie* to Shakespeare’s poetic practice entered the sphere of scholarship on Shakespeare in the twentieth century with William Rushton’s 1909 book *Shakespeare and The Arte of English Poesie*.²¹⁰ In order to prove this assumed connection, Rushton quotes various parallel passages from both the handbook on courtly rhetoric and different Shakespeare plays, but interestingly enough, he never mentions *King Lear*. Relying on Rushton’s findings, in 2002 Catherine Lisak published an article-length comparative study in which she analyzed how Shakespearean dramaturgy treats certain poetic matters also addressed in Puttenham’s work. Focusing only on three examples proposed by Rushton, namely the use of surplusage, metaphora, and the word “rascal,” Lisak concludes that not only is it obvious that Shakespeare knew these rhetorical figures and examples discussed in *The Arte of English Poesie* but he also confidently applied them in his poetic praxis.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 2.

²¹⁰ William L. Rushton: *Shakespeare and the Arte of English Poesie*, Liverpool, 1909.

²¹¹ “It transpires, without doubt, that Shakespeare had read Puttenham closely, and was sensitive to the variations in meanings Puttenham studied in his choice of quotations or particular words. Puttenham’s examples were as much exploited by the dramatist, when applying the specific figure of speech it illustrated to a dramatic piece of his own, as the definitions themselves. Turning the intolerable into a recreational piece, a solace to man’s wit, was one of Shakespeare’s ways of reading Puttenham and making use of his teaching.” Catherine Lisak:

Lisak does not extend her attention to *King Lear*, however, and she only briefly refers to Kenneth Muir's observation in the 1977 Arden Shakespeare critical edition of *King Lear* according to which the passage known as the Merlin prophesy in the Folio version of the play is "a parody of some pseudo-Chaucerian verses to be found in Puttenham."²¹² Gary Taylor repeats the same idea in the 1980s, but he is interested in this passage and the Puttenham-Shakespeare connection only as far as it helps him prove that the Folio version was edited at the same time as Shakespeare was working on *The Winter's Tale* and, thus, "whoever wrote that addition had been influenced by Puttenham – as Shakespeare had been between 1609 and 1611."²¹³

Given the distance of four hundred years, it is almost impossible to provide undeniable proof that would support the claim that Shakespeare read *The Arte of English Poesie*, although there is some evidence in support of this assumption. First, as the signature on the inside cover testifies, the original owner of the copy of *The Arte of English Poesie* in the possession of the British Museum today was Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's fellow dramatist and close friend.²¹⁴ Second, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and Puttenham's handbook were published by Richard Field, with whom Shakespeare most certainly had established both business and family ties.²¹⁵ Third, it has recently been proposed that the main reason why Shakespeare's plays reflect such a remarkable parallelism with *The Arte of English Poesy* is that Puttenham might have been Shakespeare's teacher.²¹⁶

Working as a poet and playwright whose works were performed even on the stage of the royal court, Shakespeare must have taken a natural interest in both the description of the norms of courtly rhetoric and, even more, in contemporaneous debates concerning the craft of poetry. Moreover, considering the famous line of Ben Jonson's eulogy published in the 1623 Folio, in which Johnson claimed that the Bard had "small Latine and lesse Greek,"²¹⁷

An Essay in Comparison: Shakespeare's «Technical Inventiveness» in the Light of George Puttenham's *Arte*, in *Shakespeare and Ses Contemporains. Société Française Shakespeare, Actes du Congrès de 2002*, 2002, 132–133.

²¹² Cf.: William Shakespeare: *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Kenneth Muir, London–New York, Routledge, 1977, 104.

²¹³ Gary Taylor: *The Date and Authorship of the Folio Version*, in Gary Taylor–Michael Warren (eds.): *The Division of the Kingdoms. Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear*, Oxford, Calderon Press, 1983, 385.

²¹⁴ See "Note." Puttenham: *The Arte*, npn.

²¹⁵ Gillespie: *Shakespeare's Books*, 439.

²¹⁶ Charles Murray Willis: *The Printing of The Arte of English Poesie and the Earl of Oxford*, in Richard Malim (ed.): *Great Oxford: essays on the life and work of Edward De Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, 1550–1604*, London, Parapress Limited, 2004, 38–44.

²¹⁷ Ben Jonson: *To the memory of my beloved, the Avthor Mr. William Shakespeare: and what he hath left vs*, in *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, histories & tragedies, published according to the true originall copies*, London, printed by Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount, 1623, http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/facsimile/book/SLNSW_F1/, (accessed 1 March 2009).

it is quite probable that a work rendering Latin and Greek rhetorical terms digestible even for non-highly educated readers would have been a desirable reading for Shakespeare.

In addition to the arguments presented above, there is one more practical reason why this chapter focuses on Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*. I assume that a close reading of the Shakespearean text and the study of the application of rhetorical patterns would reinforce the idea that he knew Puttenham's work. Indeed, I propose that the influence of *The Arte of English Poesie* on *King Lear* is clearly perceivable in the case of the 1608 Quarto edition in the presence of the non-conventional examples described in the handbook and occasionally even in the similarities between the wordings used by the two authors. In order to argue in support of this hypothesis, in this chapter, I analyze two particular "trial scenes" of decent courtly speech and behavior, the love contest and the mock trial of Lear's daughters, as they appear in the 1608 Quarto.

DECENCY OF PUBLIC SPEECH: THE LOVE CONTEST SCENE

In a 1999 article, William Dodd explains at length the relevance of the love contest scene to the public discourses of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by focusing on "some of the tensions that existed between personal and political in the governmental theory and practice of Elizabeth and James."²¹⁸ As I intend to use his article as a background to my findings, it seems useful to summarize his main points before focusing on the operation of rhetorical figures in the text of Shakespeare's play. Dodd claims that the public image of Queen Elizabeth was based on familiar roles, such as the mother of the Church, wife to the country, and lover of courtiers, all of which involved emotional engagements in the field of politics and often resulted in public confessions of love, which thus became "typical of the queen's manipulative technique."²¹⁹ Comparably, James I also discussed the transmission of royal power in familiar terms in his writings, such as the *Basilikon Doron*, and he established himself predominantly as a father-figure even when conferring on issues of governance. According to Dodd, what makes both monarchs similar as far as their attitudes towards political *power* were concerned is "the tendency to divorce the symbolic or theoretical dimension of royalty from the material realities of rule."²²⁰

²¹⁸ William Dodd: Impossible Worlds: What Happens in *King Lear*, Act 1, Scene 1?, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50 (1999), 481.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 483.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 484.

The love contest scene gains its poetic significance from the fact that, among all the versions of the Lear story, only Shakespeare's play presents it as a public event, which provides the frame for a sound discussion of the relevance of the public discourses in the early seventeenth century, discourses which arguably shape the characters' diction. Although *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir and his three daughters* also includes a similar scene, in that version, the conversation between the protagonist and his three daughters takes place within family circles consisting only of Leir, Gonorill, Ragan, Cordella, and Perillus, the king's councilor, on stage,²²¹ whereas in *King Lear*, it turns into a ceremonial event witnessed by the whole court. In order to see how Shakespeare elaborated on this fragment of the story, re-politicizing the utmost public topic of royal inheritance already staged by a fellow playwright even if anonymous, it is worth revisiting the two scenes and comparing them in more detail.

Long before Leir puts his daughters on trial, Skallinger, Leir's other councilor informs Ragan and Gonorill, both green with envy of their virtuous sister, that their father intends to ask them who loves him the most so that he can force his choice of husband on Cordella. Since the kings of Cambria and Cornwall, the suitors of the elder sisters, already belong to the royal family, Leir wants the King of Hibernia to join his youngest daughter in marriage in order to protect the future of his kingdom by marrying his daughters into the families of neighboring kings.²²² When they hear this news, Ragan and Gonorill agree that they will flatter their father "as he was ne're so flattered in his life"²²³ in order to take revenge on their sister, who does not like her Irish suitor.²²⁴ So at the beginning of the love trial, both the assumed audience and every character on stage except Cordella knows that Leir's words in fact cover a ploy. This dramatic context provides the ground for the protagonist's motivation to present the love trial as if its only goal were to disperse his doubts:

Deare Gonorill, kind Ragan, sweet Cordella,
Ye flourishing branches of a Kingly stocke,
Sprung from a tree that once did flourish greene,
Whose blossomes now are nipt with Winters frost,
And pale grym death doth wayt upon my steps,
And summons me unto his next Assizes.

²²¹ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. A4v–B2r.

²²² *Ibid.*, sig. A1r.

²²³ *Ibid.*, sig. A4r.

²²⁴ As Gonorill explains the logic of their plot: "I smile to think, in what a wofull plight / *Cordella* will be, when we answer thus: / For she will rather dye, then give consent / To joyne in marriage with the Irish King: / So will our father think, she loveth him not, / Because she will not graunt to his desire, / Which we will aggravate in such bitter termes, / That he will soone convert his love to hate: / For he, you know, is alwayes in extremes." *Ibid.*, sig. A4v.

Therefore, deare daughters, as ye tender the safety
Of him that was the cause of your first being,
Resolve a doubt which much molests my mind,
Which of you three to me would prove most kind;
Which loves me most, and which at my request
Will soonest yeeld unto their fathers hest.²²⁵

As opposed to the anonymous play, Shakespeare provides hardly any background information before the royal family and the courtiers proceed on stage. However, even the stage directions suggest a ceremonial procession: "Sound a Sennet, Enter one bearing a Coronet, then Lear, then the Dukes of Albany, and Cornwell, next Gonorill, Regan, Cordelia, with followers."²²⁶ Following the short and informal dialogue between Gloster and Kent, King Lear's first utterances, which are in blank verse, even stylistically mark the shift of the register and tone of the discourse:²²⁷

Meane time we will expresse our darker purposes,
The map there; know we haue diuided
In three, our kingdome; and tis our first intent,
To shake all cares and busines of our state,
Confirming them on yonger yeares,
The two great Princes *France* and *Burgundy*,
Great ryuals in our youngest daughters loue,
Long in our Court haue made their amorous sojourne,
And here are to be answerd, tell me my daughters,
Which of you shall we say doth loue vs most,
That we our largest bountie may extend,
Where merit doth most challenge it,
Gonorill our eldest borne, speake first:²²⁸

In rhetorical terms, Lear's lines fall into the category of "public speech" as opposed to the "private speech" between Leir and his daughters in the anonymous play. The distinction between the two contexts, and consequently between the characters' relationships, is clearly marked in the diction used by Leir and Lear. Perhaps the best example of this is their use of pronouns. In the passage quoted above, Leir uses the first person singular when referring to himself: "**me**"; "**my** steps"; "**my** mind"; "**my** request". King Lear's lines, in contrast, are dominated by the first person plural or the "royal we": "**our** darker

²²⁵ Ibid. sig., A4v–B1r.

²²⁶ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B1v.

²²⁷ Vickers: *Tragic Prose*, 351.

²²⁸ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B1v.

purposes"; "**we** haue diuided"; "**our** kingdome"; "**our** first intent"; "**our** state"; "**our** youngest daughters loue"; "**our** Court"; "**we** say"; "loue **vs**"; "**we our** largest bountie may extend"; "**our** eldest borne." The reason why the "public" feature of the Shakespearean context is significant is that, according to Puttenham's description at the beginning of the book on ornament, such dictions were necessarily figurative:

How our writing and speeches publike ought to be figuratiue, and if they be not doe greatly disgrace the cause and purpose of the speaker and writer. Bvt as it hath bene alwayes reputed a great fault to vse figuratiue speeches foolishly and indiscretely, so is it esteemed no lesse an imperfection in mans vtterance, to haue none vse of figure at all, specially in our writing and speeches publike, making them but as our ordinary talke, then which nothing can be more vnsauourie and farre from all ciuilitie.²²⁹

In this context, the presence of figurative speech is absolutely justified not simply because these words appear on the pages of a literary work meant to entertain people in public but also because, as the Quarto allegedly documents, both the stage setting of the love contest scene and the actual site for the 1608 performance of the play was the royal court. The stage in Whitehall undoubtedly demanded a more elaborate use of language and rhetoric than any other theaters in London. Thus, it is no wonder that, conforming to the expectations of the age and the ceremonial occasion, Gonorill and Regan use a storehouse of rhetorical figures when answering Lear's call for the love contest. Since Shakespeare, unlike the anonymous playwright, does not provide any preceding event to this public scene, the motivation of the two elder daughters is hidden from the audience, yet a careful study of the rhetorical figures they use, understood against the backdrop of Puttenham's description of the use and functions of figurative speech, can reveal their intentions.

Gonorill's first public utterance shows a carefully balanced and well-crafted rhetorical structure, a feature indicated with variously colored fonts that signal various tropes:

Sir I do loue you more then words can wield the matter,
 Dearer then eye-sight, space or libertie,
 Beyond what can be valued rich or rare,
 No lesse then life; with grace, health, beautie, honour,
 As much a child ere loued, or father friend,
 A loue that makes breath poore, and speech vnable,
 Beyond all manner of so much I loue you.²³⁰

²²⁹ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 115.

²³⁰ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B1v.

One of the most outstanding characteristics of these lines is that there is a distinctive tension between the content and form of the utterance, since the repeated phrase “I loue you” frames the seven-line-long passage describing the inexpressibility of love, although every line can be read as an attempt to define its meaning. The emphatic presence of the rhetorical figures highlighted above signals that, in the first act, the characters of *King Lear* establish a special manner of speech that Craig Kallendorf characterizes as “opaque” language, which in his wording generates passages to be “looked at not through.”²³¹ His usage of this term means that the characters’ diction draws attention to its own rhetorical construction, instead of focusing on the transparency of the referential function of language. To return to the description of the rhetorical complexity of Gonorill’s passage cited above, it is worth recalling that the third book of Puttenham’s work divides tropes into the three distinct categories of auricular, sensible, and sententious figures:

And that first sort of figures doth serue th’eare onely and may be therefore called *Auricular*: your second serues the conceit onely and not th’eare, and may be called *sensible*, not sensible nor yet sententious: your third sort serues as well th’eare as the conceit and may be called *sententious figures*, because not only they properly apperteine to full sentences, for bewtifying them with a currant & pleasant numerositie, but also giuing them efficacie, and enlarging the whole matter besides with copious amplifications.²³²

Of these three categories, Gonorill’s lines provide the most examples of aurical figures. First, due to its syntactical position, the phrase “I loue you” can be described in Puttenham’s terminology both as a prozeugma and a hypozeugma:

But if it be to mo clauses then one, that some such word be supplied to perfit the congruitie or sence of them all, it is by the figure [*Zeugma*] we call him the [*single supplie*] because by one word we serue many clauses of one congruitie [...] if it be placed in the forefront of all the seuerall clauses whome he is to serue as a common seruitour, then is he called by the Greeks *Prozeugma*, by vs the Ringleader [...] But if such supplie be placed after all the clauses, and not before nor in the middle, then is he called by the Greeks *Hypozeugma*, and by vs the [*Rereward*].²³³

Second, as the red fonts show, the second, third, fourth, and fifth lines start with an asyndeton: “Ye haue another sort of speach in a maner defectiue because it wants good band or coupling, and is the figure [*Asyndeton*] we call

²³¹ Kallendorf: *King Lear*, 106.

²³² Puttenham: *The Arte*, 133.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 136–137.

him [*loose language*] and doth not a lite alter th'eare as thus. [...] It is a figure to be vsed when we will seeme to make hast, or to be earnest, and these examples with a number more be spoken by the figure of [*lose language*]."²³⁴

In fact, the listing the words "grace, health, beautie, honour" in the second part of line four provides the audience with an example of a sententious figure called "Brachiologa, or the Cutted comma," which is so similar to asyndeton that Puttenham eventually explains the difference between the two as follows:

We vse sometimes to proceede all by single words, without any close or coupling sauing that a little pause or comma is geuen to euery word. This figure for pleasure may be called in our vulgar the cutted comma, for that there cannot be a shorter diuision then at euery words end. The Greekes in their language call it short language, as thus. *Envy, malice, flattery, disdain, Auarice, deceit, falshed, filthy gaine*. If this loose language be vsed, not in single words, but in long clauses, it is called *Asindeton*, and in both cases we vtter in that fashion, when either we be earnest, or would seeme to make hast.²³⁵

Third, the phrases in blue correspond to the figure that is known today as alliteration, through Puttenham called it parimion, explaining, "Ye do by another figure notably affect th'eare when ye make euery word of the verse to begin with a like letter."²³⁶

As far as sensible figures are concerned, Gonorill's passage, like Regan's answer to their father's question, is dominated by hyperbole, highlighted above in pink. The dramaturgical significance and poetical motivation of hyperbole can be understood with the help of Puttenham's book, which defines this figure as, "When we speake in the superlatiue and beyond the limites of credit, that is by the figure which the Greeks call Hiperbole, the Latines Dementiens or the lying figure. I for his immoderate excesse cal him the ouer reacher right with his originall or [lowd lyer] & me thinks not amisse: now when I speake that which neither I my selfe thinke to be true, nor would haue any other body beleeeue."²³⁷

Moreover, Puttenham recalls an incident at a meeting of parliament during the reign of Henry VIII when one of the persons present started praising the King in an oration which made such heavy use of hyperbole that "a graue and wise Counsellour made the speaker to be accompted a grosse flattering foole."²³⁸ Thus, in accordance with Puttenham's explanation, the application of hyperbole in Gonorill's and Regan's speech is momentous from a dramaturgical

²³⁴ Ibid., 145.

²³⁵ Ibid., 178.

²³⁶ Ibid., 145.

²³⁷ Ibid., 159–160.

²³⁸ Ibid., 160.

point of view, since it makes evident that they are flattering long before Kent names their intention in his warning to King Lear: “think’st thou that dutie / Shall haue dread to speake, when power to flatterie bowes.”²³⁹ In other words, the characteristic feature of Shakespeare’s poetic practice in this case is that the elder daughter’s act of dissimulation finds expression not only in their behavior but also in their diction.

Shakespeare, however, did diverge from his assumed historical source, *The True Chronicle Historie*, not only in the case of Gonorill and Regan but also in the case of Cordelia, whose behavior and diction differ considerably from Cordella’s reactions. Listening to the flood of her two sister’s flattering words, Cordella immediately indicates that their speeches are acts of false adulation by using a structure that strongly echoes her father’s enthusiasm. In Gonorill’s case they react in the following manner: “*Leir*. O, how thy words revive my dying soule! / *Cor*. O, how I doe abhorre this flattery!”²⁴⁰; to Ragan’s words, they respond: “*Leir*. Did never *Philomel* sing so sweet a note. / *Cord*. Did never flatterer tell so false a tale.”²⁴¹ These comments suggests that Cordella fulfills an interpretive function, and in her answer, she adopts a nonfigurative style, saying: “I cannot paynt my duty forth in words, / I hope my deeds shall make report for me: / But looke what love the child doth owe the father, / The same to you I beare, my gracious Lord.”²⁴² When both her sisters and her father scold her for the short and plain reply or, in other words, for the absence of figurative language, she excuses herself, saying: “do not so mistake my words, / Nor my playne meaning be misconstrued; / My tounge was never usde to flattery.”²⁴³ By contrast, Shakespeare’s Cordelia does the exact opposite: she does not comment on her sister’s adulation, which would signal an interpretive function, but she rather anticipates her own response to Lear’s question, an act that suggests a conscious and thoroughly planned reaction. Listening to Gonorill’s confession, Cordelia remarks: “What shall Cordelia doe, loue and be silent.”²⁴⁴ She then responds similarly to Regan’s words: “Then poore Cord. & yet not so, since I am sure / My loues more richer then my tongue.”²⁴⁵ In short, in *King Lear*, only Cordelia reveals her intentions directly to the audience, and her asides provide the backdrop to the line “Nothing my Lord,” the seemingly unexpected and embarrassing answer to King Lear’s question.

²³⁹ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B3r.

²⁴⁰ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. B1r.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, sig. B1v.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, sig. B1v.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, B1v–B2r.

²⁴⁴ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B1v.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, sig. B2r.

In rhetorical terms, Cordelia's "nothing" can be described as an extreme example of the figure of moderator or *Liptote*, which is roughly equal to the twenty-first century term "understatement." Puttenham describes how this trope operates as follows:

As by the former figure we vse to enforce our sence, so by another we temper our sence with wordes of such moderation, as in appearaunce it abateth, it but not in deede, and is by the figure *Liptote*, which therefore I call the *Moderator*, and becomes vs many times better to speake in that sort quallified, than if we spake it by more forcible termes, and neuertheles is equipolent in sence, thus. *I know you hate me not, nor wish me any ill.* Meaning in deede that he loued him very well and dearely, and yet the words doe not expresse so much, though they purport so much. Or if you would say, I am not ignorant, for I know well inough. Such a man is no foole, meaning in deede that he is a very wise man.²⁴⁶

Consequently, Cordelia's "nothing" could imply that her not saying anything is more telling than if she were to speak verbosely and windily. Plett explains her behavior as an objection to her sisters' "epideictic rhetoric of excess" in the form of "eloquent silence."²⁴⁷ Her "nothing" is not an expression of female modesty, which would have conformed to the expectations of the era, nor does it indicate "submissiveness but, rather, a protest against a rhetoric of false semblance."²⁴⁸ Nevertheless, she also reacts with the help of rhetoric since, to use Plett's wording again,

Cordelia is by her upbringing not a bad orator. She deliberately changes into one for two reasons. On the one hand she protests against the misuse of rhetoric by her sisters; on the other she wants to preserve a decorum of a different kind, that of her personal integrity. This, not surprisingly, finds its expression in the plain style that is the traditional medium for the statement of facts. Like Brutus she uses parallelism and graduations for her defense: "You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I / Return those duties back as are right fit, / Obey you, love you, and most honour you. (I.i.96-98) Here speaks the orator-logician who has a greater confidence in the force of rational argumentation than in the elaborate devices of courtly rhetoric."²⁴⁹

Refining Plett's observations, I would even claim that Cordelia's behavior is a counterreaction not only to the abuse of figurative speech but, more narrowly, to flattery itself. This claim is partly based upon a description given in Giacomo Affinati's book *The Dumb Diuine Speaker*, which was translated into English

²⁴⁶ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 153–154.

²⁴⁷ Plett: *Shakespeare*, 431.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 431.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 432.

by one of Shakespeare's fellow playwrights, Anthony Munday, in 1605: "The flatterer should haue some reason, to refrain his glib and oylie tongue, because silence is much better, then false and coyned lying speeches: for that is a sinne against nature, because, the tongue being the discouerer of the heart, in speaking otherwise then, then as the hart thinketh, it appears to haue some want in his naturall office."²⁵⁰

The similarity between this passage and Cordelia's diction in this scene is quite striking, and certain expressions, like the reference to her sisters' "glib and oylie art," echo the words quoted above. Moreover, the corporeal tropes referring to the idea of insincerity seem to reverberate in Cordelia's second utterance, when she is extending her response to Lear's question: "Vnhappie that I am, I **cannot heaue my heart into my / mouth**, I loue your Maiestie according to my bond, nor more nor lesse."²⁵¹ This statement is markedly different not only from her sisters' lengthy and crafty confessions but also from its textual antecedent, Cordelia's rather plain and nonfigurative language, since Shakespeare's Cordelia applies figurative language to answer her father's question in a manner which would be fitting of the ceremonial occasion. As the words in bold signal, Cordelia's utterance is dominated by "metaphore or the figure of transport," which Puttenham discusses among sensible figures, defining it as "a kind of wresting of a single word from his owne right signification, to another not so naturall, but yet of some affinitie or conueniencie with it."²⁵² He also explains that there are three causes for its use: "one for necessitie or want of a better word [...] for pleasure and ornament of our speech [...] Then also do we it sometimes to enforce a sence and make the word more significatiue."²⁵³ From a philological point of view, the main question in Cordelia's case is what meaning could the expression "not heaving or lifting the heart to the mouth" carry at the beginning of the seventeenth century, especially in connection with the idea of love.

One possible explanation is that it is a reference to hypocrisy, which was often visually depicted in contemporaneous emblem books, the storehouses of common knowledge, with images of the heart and the mouth. As Figure 2 shows, an insincere person was often portrayed as holding their tongue in the hand in front of the body while their heart remained hidden behind the back. This image also appears in reference to flattering courtiers (Figure 3) and even traitors (Figure 4), the latter taken from Thomas Combe's *The Theatre*

²⁵⁰ Giacomo Affinati: *The dumbe diuine speaker, or: Dumbe speaker of Diuinity A learned and excellent treatise, in praise of silence: shewing both the dignitie, and defectes of the tongue. Written in Italian, by Fra. Giacomo Affinati d'Acuto Romano. And truelie translated by A.M., At London, Printed [by R. Bradock] for William Leake, dwelling in Paules churchyard, at the signe of the Holy-ghost, 1605, sig. G3r.*

²⁵¹ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B2r.

²⁵² Puttenham: *The Arte*, 149.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 149.

of *Fine Devices*, which enjoyed widespread popularity in London around the time when *King Lear* was written.²⁵⁴ Accordingly, Cordelia's answer could be paraphrased non-figuratively, as she is not saying anything, because that would make her a hypocrite, a flatterer, or a traitor.

There is another source that records similar conventions of Early Modern representations of insincerity. Joseph Hall's *Characters of Virtues and Vices* (1608), the first English example of a genre that describes various social types, gives the following account of a hypocrite:

An hypocrite is the worst kind of player, by so much as he acts the better part: which hath always two faces; oftentimes two hearts: that can compose his forehead to sadness and gravity, while he bids his heart be wanton and careless within; and in the mean time laughs within himself to think how smoothly he hath cozened the beholder: in whose silent face are written the characters of religion, which his tongue and gestures pronounce, but his hands recant: that hath a clean face and garment, with a foul soul: whose mouth belies his heart, and his fingers belie his mouth.²⁵⁵

Significantly enough, this description applies the same body parts as the iconographic representations used in the emblem books of the period. Moreover, the same book also contains a passage on the flatterer, which perfectly illustrates the interrelated nature of the notions of hypocrisy and flattery:

Flattery is nothing, but false friendship, fawning hypocrisy, dishonest civility, base merchandise of words, a plausible discord of the heart and lips. The flatterer is blear-eyed to ill, and cannot see vices; and his tongue walks ever in one track of unjust praises, and can no more tell how to discommend than to speak true. His speeches are full of wondering interjections, and all his titles are superlative; and both of them seldom ever but in presence. His base mind is well matched with a mercenary tongue, which is a willing slave to another man's ear; neither regardeth he how true, but how pleasing.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Thomas Combe's *The Theatre of Fine Devices* is in fact the English translation of a French emblem book, Guillaume de la Perrière's *Theatre des bons engins*. For helping me clearly understand the meaning of the Middle French text of the emblem, I owe a debt of gratitude to Mihály Bende. As figures 2 and 3 clearly show, it is rather an adaptation or reworking of the original as both the picture and the text of the emblem diverge from the source material and vulgarize the topic of courtly flattery. Although the only copy of Thomas Combe's work still available today is the 1614 edition, which, similarly to Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*, was published by Richard Field, yet it gained wide-spread popularity in England twenty years earlier when its first edition was published. See Peter M. Daly: The Case for the 1593 Edition of Thomas Combe's Theater of Fine Devices, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 49 (1986), 255–257.

²⁵⁵ Joseph Hall: *Characters of Vertues and Vices in two Books*, London, printed by Melch. Bradwood, 1608, <http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/hallch.htm>, (accessed 11 January 2010).

²⁵⁶ Ibid., npn.

Both the emblems and these descriptions of the character book seem to suggest that, although Cordelia's utterance and behavior differ significantly from Cordella's reactions in the anonymous play, they still conform to certain conventions of the Early Modern period that could be traced in the sources mentioned above.

Further enhancing the semantic complexity of the trope, Dodd recalls that during Elizabeth's reign, the "heart-mouth/love-tongue motif [...] was often bandied about during real political love games."²⁵⁷ It was even used by the Queen in the so-called Golden Speech, delivered in the Parliament in 1601, which echoes many elements of Shakespeare's wording in the love contest scene:

I do assure you, that there is no Prince that loveth his Subjects better, or whose Love can countervail our Love; There is no Jewel, be it of never so rich a prize, which I prefer before this Jewel, I mean your Love; for I do more esteem it than any Treasure or Riches: for that we know how to prize, but Love and Thanks I count inestimable. [...] Of my self I must say this, I never was any greedy, scraping Grasper, nor a strait fast-holding Prince, nor yet a Waster; My heart was never set on Worldly Goods, but only for my Subjects good. What you do bestow on me, I will not hoard it up, but receive it to bestow on you again. Yea mine own properties I count yours to be expended for your good. Therefore render unto them from me I beseech you, M^r Speaker, such thanks as you imagine my Heart yieldeth, but my Tongue cannot express.²⁵⁸

Annabel Patterson, however, contends that Cordelia's trope can be regarded as a reproach to the closing words of James I's speech delivered to the 1604 Parliament,²⁵⁹ in which he describes the royal public discourse he intends to establish as "that as farre as a King is in Honor erected aboue any of his Subiects, so far should he striue in sinceritie to be aboue them all, and that his tongue should be euer the true Messenger of his heart: and this sort of Eloquence may you euer assuredly looke for at my hands."²⁶⁰

Returning to Cordelia's statement, the word "cannot" also becomes a sort of an interpretive puzzle due to the various meanings of the verb. First, it may refer to her incapability to speak as her sisters do, a reading that is supported by her later reference to her sisters' "glib and oyly Art," whose "tongue" she is

²⁵⁷ Dodd: *Impossible Worlds*, 483.

²⁵⁸ *The journals of all the Parliaments during the reign of Queen Elizabeth both of the House of Lords and House of Commons*, collected by Sir Simonds d'Ewes, knight and baronet of Stow Hall in Suffolk, revised and published in 1682 by his nephew, the lawyer and antiquary Paul Bowes, London, printed for John Starkey, 1682, 659.

²⁵⁹ Patterson: "Betweene," 72.

²⁶⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 74. The speech, which was published in the same year and widely circulated in the country and in contemporaneous documents, describes the common people's interest in the matter. *Ibid.*, 66–72.

glad not to have.²⁶¹ Second, it could also mean that the situation itself makes it impossible for her to speak. Given the ceremonial context, Cordelia sees Lear as the King rather than her father, which is even linguistically marked, since in this scene she consistently addresses him either as "lord" or "majesty."²⁶² Thus, her words signal that in a public speech, she finds her social role more imperative than her filial duties, and were she to join the rhetorical game her sisters have started, anything she might say would be nothing but flattery, treason, or both. To strengthen this second meaning, there is a scene later in the play that highlights the contrast between Cordelia's public and private behavior concerning her relation to Lear. When Kent asks the Gentleman about Cordelia's reaction to his letter in which Kent informs her of Lear's desperate state after his outburst of madness in the storm scene, the words Shakespeare uses to describe her verbal response are the following: "Faith once or twice she **heau'd the name of father**, / Pantingly forth as if it **prest her heart**."²⁶³ In this case the repetition of the same expression that Cordelia uses to define her relation to Lear in the love trial scene indicates that during a less formal, semi-private conversation, which significantly enough does not take place on stage, she identifies this emotional rapport in familiar terms.

With regard to the poetical peculiarities of Shakespeare's craft as a playwright, Tom McAlindon calls attention to one more aspect of the trope of the heart. As he argues, not only does it describe Cordelia's "nature and dramatic role," but once she utters the sentence that she cannot heave her heart into her mouth, the figure also "functions as a silent pun," relying on the etymological root of her name, the Latin "cor" meaning heart.²⁶⁴ This connection between the name and the character is further supported by the lexical repetition of the word "heart," as Lear himself refers to Cordelia with the trope of the heart three times in this scene.²⁶⁵

So far, I have shown how the tropes in Cordelia's utterances especially the trope of the heart become semantically dense even in a historical reading, and it is precisely this feature of Shakespeare's art that makes it so difficult to reconstruct the meanings to which the character's figurative words may refer, especially from a twenty-first century perspective. Yet, this semantic complexity should be distinguished from ambiguity or "Amphibologia," which Puttenham describes as one of the vices in speech and writing:

²⁶¹ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B4r.

²⁶² In fact, she calls him "maiesty" twice ("I loue your Maiestie according to my bond" (sig. B2r); "I yet beseech your Maiestie" (sig. B4v.)) and addresses him "lord" four times ("Nothing my Lord"; "Good my Lord" "I good my Lord" "So yong my Lord and true" (sig. B2r)).

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, sig. I1r.

²⁶⁴ Tom McAlindon: *Tragedy, King Lear and the Politics of the Heart*, *Shakespeare Survey* 44 (1991), 87.

²⁶⁵ "But goes this with thy heart?" (sig. B2r); "as a stranger to my heart and me" and "as here I giue, / Her fathers heart from her"(sig. B2v).

[...] when we speake or write doubtfully and that the sence may be taken two wayes, such ambiguous termes they call *Amphibologia*, we call it the *ambiguous*, or figure of sence incertaine [...] these doubtfull speaches were vsed much in the old times by their false Prophets as appeareth by the Oracles of *Delphos* and of the *Sybilles* prophecies deuised by the religious persons of those dayes to abuse the superstitious people, and to encomber their busie braynes with vaine hope or vaine feare.[...] In effect all our old, Brittish and Saxon prophesies be of the same sort, that turne them on which side ye will, the matter of them may be verified, neuertheslesse carryeth generally such force in the heades of fonde people, that by the comfort of those blind prophecies many insurrections and rebellions haue bene stirred vp in this Realme [...] our maker shall therefore auoyde all such ambiguous speaches vnlesse it be when he doth it for the nonce and for some purpose.²⁶⁶

The interpretation of Cordelia's utterance is further complicated by a similar semantic complexity that can be found in the second half of her statement of love in the case of the word "bond." One feasible solution to overcome the difficulty of finding the meaning of a figurative expression like the one she uses is to explore other contemporaneous texts with which the assumed audience could have been familiar. Luckily, in this case, some precedent can be found in *The True Chronicle Historie*, in which the trope appears first as a metaphor for the marital plight ("joyne with thee in Hymens sacred bonds")²⁶⁷ and then as a trope for the bribe money Gonorill offers the Messenger to kill her father ("Gon. In token of further imployment, take that. *Flings him a purse. Mes. A strong Bond, a firme Obligation*").²⁶⁸ Obviously, however, none of these meanings would fit the context of Shakespeare's play. Muir, the aforementioned editor of the 1977 Arden Shakespeare critical edition, cites two other passages from *King Lear* ("the bond crack'd 'twixt son and father" and "bond of childhood") and explains the meaning of "bond" as filial obligation or bounden duty.²⁶⁹ A special combination of the previous two ideas can be found in Donald C. Freeman's 1993 article, which offers a lengthy discussion of the interpretation of this trope as it is embedded in various semantic fields of the scene. Applying the cognitive theory of metaphors, Freeman proposes that "the scene's figurative language depends upon metaphoric projection from the schemata—skeletalised structures of knowledge—of BALANCE and LINKS into the abstractions of filial love and family relationships. The metaphors arising from the BALANCE schema, in particular, are organised

²⁶⁶ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 217–218.

²⁶⁷ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. C2v.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., sig D3r.

²⁶⁹ Shakespeare: *King Lear*, 9.

into a scenario, an interpretive framework, of financial accounting."²⁷⁰ Thus the word bond refers to a financial obligation that fits into Lear's "financial accounting scenario,"²⁷¹ since he sees his children as assets on a balance sheet and their love as interest. Within this theoretical framework, abstraction as an element of figurative language is deeply rooted in everyday experience, and metaphors thus appear as "embodied human understanding."²⁷² Freeman argues that calling this scene of *King Lear* a "love trial" is not appropriate as, unlike the mock trial scene, it does not depend on legal vocabulary, but rather exploits the semantic field of financial accounting.²⁷³ As a response to the balance schema that Lear initiates, Cordelia intends to set what Freeman calls the links schema, in which bond is understood as the physical link between father and daughters, or in other words, as family ties. Thus the word "bond," according to Freeman, becomes a generative metaphor for the idea that family relations are not the object of measures but rather human connections or "links."²⁷⁴ In Freeman's reading, it is obvious that Cordelia uses the word "bond" to fit her father's literal understanding of the word, yet she herself grasps the metaphorical meaning referring to the filial link, which results in her intentionally tying the balance and the links schemata. Therefore, her use of the polysemous "bond" "epitomizes the competition between the financial accounting and links metaphors crucial to the play's conceptual structure."²⁷⁵ Coherent, consistent, and scientific as his interpretation may be, I believe there are certain points that Freeman failed to notice due to his strong focus on the mercantile aspect of the scene.

First, the major change Shakespeare introduced compared to his sources is the transposition of the private, household dialogue of the royal family into a public and ceremonial context, which contradicts Freeman's contention concerning Cordelia's emphasis on family relations. Shifting the interpretive framework of the word bond from the private to the public seems especially plausible when one also considers that the utterance in which her "bond" appears ("Vnhappie that I am, I cannot heaue my heart into my / mouth, I loue your Maiestie according to my bond, nor more nor lesse"²⁷⁶) is remarkably formal and thus denotes the style of public rather than private speech as discussed above.

Second, if one understands "bond" narrowly as a financial reference, as Freeman suggests one should, in Puttenham's terminology, this trope would fit the category of "Catathesis or the figure of abuse," a derivative of metaphor:

²⁷⁰ Donald C. Freeman: "According to my bond:" *King Lear* and Re-cognition, *Language and Literature* 2 (1993), 1.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁷⁶ Shakespeare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B2r.

But if for lacke of naturall and proper terme or worde we take another, neither naturall nor proper and do vntruly applie it to the thing which we would seeme to expresse, and without any iust inconuenience, it is not then spoken by this figure *Metaphore* or of *inuersion* as before, but by plaine abuse [...] as ne said very pretily in this verse. *I lent my love to losse, and gaged my life in vaine*. Whereas this worde lent is properly of mony or some such other thing, as men do commonly borrow, for vse to be repayd againe, and being applied to loue is vtterly abused, and yet very commendably spoken by virtue of this figure. For he that loueth and is not beloued againe, hath no lesse wrong, than he that lendeth and is neuer repayde.²⁷⁷

As Puttenham highlights, the ideas of money and love are incompatible. Consequently, if Cordelia's "bond" is used in a manner similar to "lent," then it calls attention to the abuse of figurative speech itself. Nevertheless, there is one conventional trope that connects love to bond, but it refers to attachments of a social type, and interestingly enough, this reference failed to catch Freeman's attention. The trope "bond of charity" was often cited in Early Modern England from the Gospel (Colossians 3:14), and it was used, for example, in sermons in Shakespeare's days, as it stood for the force of Christian love, which bonds the members of the community into an organic whole. As John Winthrop memorably explained in his *Modell of Christian Charity*:

The deffinition which the Scripture giues us of loue is this. Love is the bond of perfection, first it is a bond or ligament. 2ly it makes the worke perfect. There is noe body but consists of partes and that which knitts these partes together, giues the body its perfection, because it makes eache parte soe contiguous to others as thereby they doe mutually participate with each other, both in strengthe and infirmity, in pleasure and paine.²⁷⁸

Taking "bond" as an allusion to charity is perfectly in line with the idea proposed above, namely that Cordelia, unlike her sisters, does not define her relationship to Lear in terms of her personal emotions, but rather on the basis of her position within the social structure of the community. This interpretation gains support from the special setting of the 1606 performance on Saint Stephen's day celebrating a martyr whose figure embodies the idea of Christian charity. Moreover, Cordelia's relation to Lear from a societal point of view also represents a subject's attachment to the head of the country and the Church at the same time, due to the political and religious unity of the Church of England.

²⁷⁷ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 150.

²⁷⁸ John Winthrop: *A Modell of Christian Charity*, Boston, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1838, 40.

To summarize, the significance of the rhetorical figures that dominate Cordelia's diction comes from the fact that they reinterpret the definitions of love set by Gonorill and Regan and shift the meaning of this notion from a private, interpersonal relation into a public and communal context.²⁷⁹ Thus, her figurative speech, which is intended both to please the ears and to move the mind, fulfills the requirements Puttenham had for figures that in his view are "[...] the instruments of ornament in euery language, so be they also in a sort abuses or rather trespasses in speach, because they passe the ordinary limits of common vtterance, and be occupied of purpose to deceiue the eare and also the minde, drawing it from plainnesse and simplicitie to a certain doublenesse."²⁸⁰

Still, Cordelia is not the only one whose diction in Shakespeare's *King Lear* becomes more rhetoricized as compared to the anonymous *Chronicle Historie*. Although Perillus, the king's councilor, is also present during the love contest scene, similarly to Kent, he keeps silent while listening to Leir's conversation with his daughters, and he speaks his mind to the audience only when the royal family has left the stage and expresses his regret that Leir has fallen for his elder daughters' adulation: "Oh, how I grieve, to see my Lord thus fond, / To dote so much upon vayne flattering words. / Ah, if he but with good advice had weyghed, / The hidden tenure of her humble speech, / Reason to rage should not have given place, / Nor poore *Cordella* suffer such disgrace."²⁸¹

When he learns that Lear has turned his royal authority over to his elder daughters and has disinherited Cordelia, Shakespeare's Kent commits an act much bolder than Perillus and rather indecently confronts Lear with his mistake, addressing him as a man and not as a king: "Be Kent vnmanly when Lear is man, / When wilt thou doe ould man, think'st thou that dutie / Shall haue dread to speake, when power to flatterie bowes, / To plainness honour bound when Maiesty stoops to folly."²⁸² As Kent's rude behavior, expressed by his non-figurative and disrespectful utterance, is anything but acceptable from a royal subject,²⁸³ Lear yells at him to get out of his sight, yet Kent, reluctant to leave, warns the King again, but at the same time, he also

²⁷⁹ Cordelia's reference to love as Christian charity is foreshadowed in the short scene that stages the conversation between Gloster, Kent, and Edmund before the royal ceremony of love contest takes place. Being introduced to Edmund, Kent greets him saying, "I must loue you, and sue to know you better." Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B1v.

²⁸⁰ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 128.

²⁸¹ Anonymous: *The True Chronicle*, sig. B2r–B2v.

²⁸² Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B3r.

²⁸³ As James Shapiro explains, "calling Lear 'old man' is insulting enough to modern ears, but Kent addressing his king as 'thou' would have struck contemporaries as even more extraordinary and foolhardy. In Jacobean England 'thou' and 'you' were used with precision and purpose. At the risk of oversimplifying usage that could be even more nuanced or ironic: superiors (or members of the upper class speaking to each other) were addressed as 'you' inferiors as 'thou' [...] As these examples suggest, Shakespeare was alert to how the

defines his relationship to Lear with figurative speech: "See better Lear and let me still remaine, / The true blanke of thine eye."²⁸⁴ The rhetorical figure that Kent applies is synecdoche, which Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* explains in the following terms:

If we vse such a word (as many times we doe) by which we driue the hearer to conceiue more or lesse or beyond or otherwise then the letter expresseth [...] the Greeks then call it *Synecdoche*, the Latines *sub intellectio* or vnderstanding, for by part we are enforced to vnderstand the whole, by the whole part, by many things one thing, by one, many, by a thing precedent, a thing consequent, and generally one thing out of another by maner of contrariety to the word which is spoken, *aliud ex alio*, which because it seemeth to aske a good, quick, and pregnant capacitie, and is not for an ordinarie or dull wit so to do, I chose to call him the figure not onely of conceit after the Greeke originall, but also of quick conceite [...] and this conceit being drawn aside, and (as it were) from one thing to another, it encombers the minde with a certaine imagination what it may be that is meant, and not expressed.²⁸⁵

The most plausible meaning of the eye-metaphor that Kent applies to describe his relationship to Lear is easier to find than it was in the case of Cordelia's figurative diction. The dramatic source which offers clues to its interpretation is *The Tragedy of Gorboduc*, with which Shakespeare was most certainly familiar,²⁸⁶ as one of its characters, Arostus, describes the King as the head of the country, whereas as an adviser, he takes the position of the eye in the social hierarchy of the body politic.²⁸⁷ Thus, based on Puttenham's definition, Kent's figure of synecdoche fulfills a poetic function very similar to Cordelia's "bond," since by defining himself as Lear's eye, Kent figuratively recalls the notion of the body politic, which Lear, as the monarch, is supposed to embody. This reference also carries some relevance to contemporaneous public discourses, since James I often referred to himself as the head of the body politic symbolizing the unity of England and Scotland. In a 1996 article, Jonathan Baldo convincingly argues that, for James, the main motivation behind this propaganda was to conceal his partiality for his Scottish subjects:

slightest and seemingly most insignificant of details defined a character or altered the mood of a scene." Shapiro: *The Year*, 59.

²⁸⁴ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B3r.

²⁸⁵ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 154, 163.

²⁸⁶ Barbara Heliodora Carneiro De Mendonça: The Influence of *Gorboduc* on *King Lear*, *Shakespeare Survey* 13 (1966), 78–104.

²⁸⁷ "And to this Realm whole worthy head you are [...] for whom much harder is / With lessened strength and double weight to bear / your eye, your Council." Thomas Norton – Thomas Sackville: *The Tragedy of Gorboduc*, imprinted at London in Fletestreet at the sign of the Falcon by William Griffith, 1565, <http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/gorboduc.html>, (accessed 1 April 2020).

Much of the political rhetoric of Renaissance England seems to suggest that the perfect sovereign is also the perfect synecdoche: a part of the body politic that stands for, represents, or almost mystically makes present the whole; and an embodiment of the whole that will override party and faction and, because of his or her impartiality, be trusted to take the part of any of that body's wronged members. King James was especially concerned to present himself as impartial; given suspicions that he would be partial in his acts and decrees to the Scotsmen many English feared would impoverish their own country.²⁸⁸

To sum up the findings of this chapter, the juxtaposition of the Quarto text of *King Lear* with its most direct dramatic source, *The True Chronicle Historie*, reveals that Shakespeare, instead of presenting the love contest as a private conversation, sets it against the backdrop of a public context and shapes Lear's conversation with his daughters according to the contemporaneous expectations of public speech. Changing the dramaturgical context involves a change in the characters' diction, which becomes permeated with the tropes of contemporaneous public discourses. Even if there is no extrinsic evidence that would undeniably prove that Shakespeare did read Puttenham's handbook, the background knowledge with which this work provides twenty-first century readers ultimately furthers a more nuanced understanding of the playwright's poetic practice. As the previous analysis of the love contest scene reflected the seventeenth-century idea of decent public speech, now my attention turns to the so-called "mock trial" scene, which in my interpretation challenges the notion of decent courtly behavior as it was described in *The Arte of English Poesie*.

²⁸⁸ Jonathan Baldo: *Partial to Synecdoche (Ophelia's Rhetoric) in The Unmasking of Drama, Contested Representation in Shakespeare's Tragedies*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1996, 46.



Figure 2. Frustra Me Colunt²⁸⁹

Image published by permission of University of Glasgow Library,
Archives & Special Collections. Sp Coll S.M.772, folio i1r.

²⁸⁹ Georgette De Montenay: *Emblematum Christianorum Centuria / Cent Emblemes Chrestiennes*, Zurich, Christoph Froschover, 1584, <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/books>, (accessed 1 March 2009).

The English transcription of the text of the emblem is the following: With the mouth alone you will venerate God in vain; true piety/reverence (religio) resides in the depths of the heart. So stop forming lies with a false tongue but rather revere God with your mind/soul (mens).



Figure 3. Emblem LXXIII.²⁹⁰

Image published by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Archives & Special Collections. Sp Coll S.M.686, folio k6v.

²⁹⁰ Guillaume La Perrière: *Theatre des bons engins*, Paris, Denis Janot, n.d. (1544), <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/books>, (accessed 1 March 2009).

The English transcription of the text of the emblem is the following: The flatterers of the court hold their tongues in their hands / and they offer their service to anyone who comes / until they inhumanly / satisfy their insatiable hearts. / To demonstrate that they are amiable, / they are very cunning with little emotion. / It marvels when the heart counterfeits / but oh, many people recoil: / since due to the tainted intention / they have their tongue in the front and their heart behind.

EMBLEME LXXIII

*A traitor and a flattering friend;
Say that they neuer do intend.*



The flatterers and traitors both be such,
That with their words their thoughts do not touch,
For till iust triall bring them to the touch, (gree:
They seeme in shew most faithfull friends to bee:
But little will they do, professing much;
And inwardly from friendship they do flee;
Who when their heart behind they do conuay,
They beare in hand their tongue another way.
With

Figure 4. Embleme LXXIII.²⁹¹

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²⁹¹ Thomas Combe (trans.): *The Theater of Fine Devices, containing an hundred morall Emblemes*, London, printed by Richard Field, 1614, sig. F2v. Image produced by ProQuest LLC as part of ProQuest® Early English Books Online (EEBO). www.proquest.com.

DECENCY OF COURTLY BEHAVIOR: THE MOCK TRIAL SCENE

In the so-called mock trial scene, Gloster and Kent escort Lear and his companions, the Fool and Edgar in the guise of poor Tom, to a hovel in order to protect them from the storm and console Lear after his highly intense fit of madness. As the second of Lear's three mad scenes, this part bears special significance, since it also stages the last appearance of the Fool, who, to borrow Ioppolo's wording, is the king's "court jester, and surrogate son, but more importantly his uninhibited alter ego and conscience."²⁹²

As for the reception history of *King Lear*, the mock trial has long been in the focus of scholarly attention, mainly for two reasons. First, it proved an excellent passage with which to demonstrate the textual ambiguities of the play, as the 1608 Pied Bull Quarto edition contains thirty lines and Edgar's soliloquy, which are missing from the 1623 Folio; whereas in the Folio, there are two utterances made by the Fool which are unique additions to the Quarto text. In order to visualize the textual ambiguities, in the appendix I conflated the Quarto and Folio texts and marked their special qualities with different colors. The portion of the text that both the Quarto and the Folio share appears in black; the passages that only the Pied Bull Quarto contains are highlighted in green; and the lines in red indicate passages that appear only in the Folio version. Many questions have been raised and many hypotheses have been formulated about whether the earlier version of the text was changed to conform to the constraints of censorship, as for instance Annabel Patterson or Paul Hammond claim,²⁹³ or the playwright himself introduced these changes in the text for dramaturgical reasons.²⁹⁴ Regardless of the reasons for the textual revision, even at first sight it is obvious that the Folio version is shorter, it shifts attention to Lear's madness and his accusation of Regan, and it completely lacks the extraordinary trial of Gonorill's case.

²⁹² Ioppolo (ed.): *A Routledge*, 123.

²⁹³ Patterson: "Betweene," 58–73. In a recent article, Paul Hammond also proposes that the Fool's lines might contain covert references to King James' sexual preferences, and that may explain why they were omitted. Cf.: Paul Hammond: James I's Homosexuality and the Revision of the Folio Text of *King Lear*, *Notes and Queries* 44:1 (1997), 62–64. Even if one does not find Hammond's arguments convincing, the publication of his article shows that scholars still regard this question as worthy of discussion.

²⁹⁴ As Roger Warren argues, the parts which were omitted from the Quarto shift attention to the meeting of the mad Lear with the blind Gloster in act 4, scene 6, and thus help speed up the action. These omissions contain details that are later treated in a more detailed manner. Roger Warren: *The Folio Omission of the Mock Trial. Motives and Consequences*, in Roger Warren: *The Division of the Kingdoms. Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear*, Oxford, Calderon Press, 1983, 49.

Secondly, the Quarto version of this passage has also been studied in order to illustrate “Shakespeare’s familiarity with criminal procedure”²⁹⁵ and his “use of technical legal phraseology.”²⁹⁶ Such claims are based on one particular line uttered by Lear: “thou robbed man of Iustice take thy place, & thou his yokefellow of equity, bench by his side, you are ot’h commission, sit you too.”²⁹⁷ According to Mary Sokol, this sentence is a direct reference to the equity jurisdiction of the Court of Chancery, the institution the decisions of which were not based on common law and precedents but on natural justice, allowing for a fair judgment in a situation which was not covered by the existing law. For comparison, the state trial of Mary, Queen of Scots, James I’s mother, also took place at the Court of Chancery.²⁹⁸ Since the title page of the 1608 Quarto version clearly states that this text was based on a court performance at Whitehall in December 1606 in James I’s presence, many topical allusions to contemporaneous trials have been traced in interpretations of this scene.

To begin with, Leah Marcus draws attention to the fact that, at the time of the play’s performance at Whitehall, the Parliament was debating the details of the Union of the Kingdom and the naturalization of the Scots.²⁹⁹ Moreover, in 1608, when the Quarto was printed, the case of the Post Nati, the children born after the Union, was tried at the Court of Chancery, which decided in favor of their right to citizenship on the basis of civil law and equity. It was this court that King James, like Lear, used to work his will with the help of the judges who were under his influence.³⁰⁰

On the other hand, William Gulstad argues that “the details of the mock trial re-enforce its connection to witchcraft in general” and particularly to Reginald Scot’s work, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*,³⁰¹ a sixteenth-century narrative account of witch trials. To single out one of his examples, the line in which the Fool says to the imaginary Gonorill, “Cry you mercy I tooke you for a ioyne stoole” can be read not only as a seventeenth-century colloquial expression used to apologize for overlooking a person, but also as an allusion to witchcraft, since, according to traditional folklore, “it was believed that for purposes of obscuring their movements witches left behind them, among other things, joint-stools, enchanted in such a way as to assume their likenesses.”³⁰²

²⁹⁵ John Lord Campbell: *King Lear*, in John Lord Campbell: *Shakespeare’s Legal Acquirements*, New York, D. Appleton & Co., 1859, 102.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

²⁹⁷ Shakespeare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. G4r.

²⁹⁸ B. J. Sokol–Mary Sokol: Introduction, in B. J. Sokol–Mary Sokol: *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage*, Cambridge–New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 6–7.

²⁹⁹ Marcus: *Retrospective*, 150.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁰¹ William Gulstad: Mock-trial or witch-trial in *King Lear?*, *Notes and Queries* 41:4 (1994), 495.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 497.

Last but not least, it has also been proposed that since the trial Lear conducts is in fact an “act of treason,” this scene could allude to the trial of the participants in the Gunpowder Plot, whose court case was settled in March 1606.³⁰³ Regarding the textual instability discussed earlier, we can see that all three contemporaneous cases mentioned above lost their topicality by the time the Folio was published, which offers a plausible explanation for why these lines were cut from the 1623 version.

Obviously, the complex web of topical allusions is nearly impossible to untangle, yet as far as the dramaturgy is concerned, I would like to argue that the setting of this scene shows strong correspondence with contemporaneous descriptions of indecent or unmannerly behavior found in Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*. The third book of this work, which is dedicated to the poetic use of figurative language, contains a chapter on decent behavior that seems to diverge from the book's main line of discussion. However, Puttenham argues that “the good maker or poet who is in decent speach & good termes to describe all things and with prayse or dispraise to report euery mans behauaiour, ought to know the comelinesse of an action aswell as of a word.”³⁰⁴

Despite the allusions to contemporaneous court cases mentioned above, the whole scene seems much more like a parody of a “trial in absentia”³⁰⁵ at which the culprits are not present and the judges are singing,³⁰⁶ so the main emphasis falls on the weird behavior and diction of the people on stage. Based on conventional presumptions, court trials are supposed to be the epitome of public speech, yet what happens in this scene is anything but publicly acceptable. But this mock trial illustrating indecent behavior could have given Shakespeare an excellent opportunity to entertain his audience and thus provide some comic relief between two brutal scenes: Lear's fit of madness in the storm, which precedes it, and Gloster's blinding, which follows it. Modern adaptations very often lack this entertaining feature, yet Puttenham's book provides a written record which helps modern readers reconstruct how the dramaturgy of the action relied on the expectations of the Early Modern audience. In what follows, it is worth taking a closer look at the characters participating in Lear's “mock-trial” and, in particular, at their appearance and diction, and it is worth contrasting the scene with the relevant passages of Puttenham's description of decent courtly behavior.

³⁰³ Nina Taunton–Valerie Hart: *King Lear*, King James and the Gunpowder Treason of 1605, *Renaissance Studies* 17 (2003), 709–710.

³⁰⁴ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 231.

³⁰⁵ Owen Hood Phillips: Trial Scenes, in Owen Hood Phillips: *Shakespeare and the Lawyers*, London–New York, Routledge, 2005 [1972], 90.

³⁰⁶ In the appendix, the underlined lines indicate the sentences that were actually sung.

The Participants in the Trial

Even a twenty-first century audience can feel that there is something extraordinary about the combination of characters when King Lear, the old man of royal origin, appears with Edgar, who is obviously much younger than he is even if he has disguised himself as a beggar, and with the professional Fool, who converses with Lear in riddles from the beginning of the play. Nevertheless, this strange assortment of characters constituted an even sharper shock for the expectations of Early Modern courtly society, as Puttenham asserts:

And in the choise of a mans delights & maner of his life, there is a decencie, and so we say th'old man generally is no fit companion for the young man, nor the rich for the poore, nor the wise for the foolish. Yet in some respects and by discretion it may be otherwise, as when the old man hath the gouernment of the young, the wise teaches the foolish, the rich is wayted on by the poore for their reliefe, in which regard the conuersation is not indecent.³⁰⁷

Thus, it seems that the characters themselves provide the first example of indecency as this notion was understood in the seventeenth century. Even if one argues that from a dramaturgical point of view this part of the play should be considered a “play-within-the-play”³⁰⁸ and the characters are actually imitating a court trial, Edgar and the Fool’s songs still challenge the expectations regarding proper manners. To recall Puttenham again, “[...] after the same rate euery sort and maner of businesse or affaire or action hath his decencie and vndecencie, either for the time or place or person or some other circumstaunce, as [...] a Iudge to be incorrupted, solitarie and vnacquainted with Courtiers or Courtly entertainements.”³⁰⁹

Based on Puttenham’s description, the presence of the Fool, who is the emblem of courtly entertainment, and the songs they are singing intensify the impression that, even for a trial scene, this passage of the textplay is indecently written.

Although we have little reliable evidence concerning the costumes the actors might have been wearing in 1606, Puttenham states the contemporaneous presumption that people’s identity should be clearly determined by their appearance on the basis of the contemporaneous “dress code:” “And in the vse of apparell there is no litle decency and vndecencie to be perceiued, as well for the fashion as the stuffe, for it is comely that euery estate and vocation should be knowen by the differences of their habit: a clarke from a lay man: a

³⁰⁷ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 234.

³⁰⁸ Taylor–Warren: *The Division*, 89.

³⁰⁹ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 245.

gentleman from a yeoman: a souldier from a citizen, and the chiefe of euery degree from their inferiours, because in confusion and disorder there is no manner of decencie.”³¹⁰

In *King Lear*, there are at least two passages that make this description relevant to the interpretation of this scene, one of which is the Fool's riddle, when he asks Lear, “Prithe Nunckle tell me, whether a mad man be a Gentleman or a Yeoman.”³¹¹ According to Puttenham's examples, this question could be easily decided by looking at their clothing, yet Lear's answer refers to Lear himself: “A King, a King...” though the only “mad” character on stage is Edgar in the disguise of the half-naked poor Tom. Nevertheless, later, Lear draws attention to Edgar's clothing again, saying, “You sir, I entertaine you for one of my hundred, / Only I do not like the fashion of your garments youle say, / They are Persian attire, but let them be chang'd.”³¹² Puttenham also provides a description of the characteristics of Persian clothing: “And the country custome maketh things decent in vse [...] The Turke and Persian to wear great tolibants of ten, fifteen, and twentie ells of linen a peece vpon their heads, which can not be remooued: in Europe to were caps or hats, which vpon euery occasion of saluation we vse to put of, as a sign of reuerence.”³¹³

If Lear's remark on “Persian attire” partly refers to Edgar's imaginary tolibant, then the king seems to ask him to take it off, which Edgar could hardly do, according to Puttenham's description; therefore, these lines may also contribute to the indecent quality of the scene.³¹⁴ Yet the source of mockery in both cases is the fact that the characters point out something unacceptable about Edgar's clothing, though Edgar actually appears as a half-naked madman.

Still, by seventeenth-century standards, Edgar's most outrageously indecent deed is in fact that he almost starts crying: “My teares begin to take his part so much, They marre my counterfetting.”³¹⁵ As Puttenham explains, “but generally to weepe for any sorrow (as one may doe for pitie) is not so decent in a man: and therefore all high minded persons, when they cannot chuse but

³¹⁰ Ibid., 237.

³¹¹ Shakespeare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. G3v.

³¹² Ibid., sig. G4r–G4v.

³¹³ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 239.

³¹⁴ According to the OED, in the seventeenth century, the words attire and garment had general meanings and could denote any article of dress. In the case of attire, the dictionary lists a meaning typical of the sixteenth and seventeenth century: “a head-dress of women,” which could strengthen the impression that these lines might have referred to a piece of clothing on Edgar's head. And if this association with female pieces of clothing is appropriate, then the scene gains an even more comical overtone.

³¹⁵ Shakespeare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. G4r.

shed teares, will turne away their face as a countenance vndecent for a man to shew, and so will the standers by till they haue suppress such passion, thinking it nothing decent to behold such an vncomely countenance.”³¹⁶

The Characters’ Diction

From a dramaturgical point of view, the mock trial scene is supposed to illustrate that King Lear is mad or, in Kent’s words, “his wits are gone,” but, in contrast with the storm scene, here his madness is manifest not in the form of passion, but through his behavior in a situation which mimics the utmost public event, during which he completely violates courtly etiquette. Therefore, this scene becomes the climax of the play, as it provides the parody of public speech and behavior and is in sharp contrast with the ceremonial public discourses at the beginning and the end of *King Lear*. The comic elements are also strengthened by the indecent features I mentioned earlier and, last but not least, by the non-referential utterances of Lear’s companions.

What we can see after the comparison of the Quarto and Folio versions of the text is that the omitted passages include some sort of direct contact with the courtly audience in the form of entertainment such as the Fool’s joint-stool joke or Edgar’s songs and vision of the foul fiend that is the devil, which, according to twentieth-century scholar Roger Warren, all lead to “a generalized sense of chaos.”³¹⁷ Nevertheless, Puttenham reminds us that for the Early Modern audience, indecency was the main source of laughter:

But most certainly all things that moue a man to laughter, as doe these scurrilities & other ridiculous behaiours, it is for some vndecencie that is found in them; which maketh it decent for euery man to laugh at them. And therefore when we see or heare a natural foole and idiot doe or say any thing foolishly, we laugh not at him: but when he doeth or speaketh wisely, because that is vnlike him selfe: and a buffonne or counterfeit foole, to heare him speake wisely which is like himself, it is no sport at all, but for such a counterfeit to talke and looke foolishly it maketh vs laugh, because it is no part of his naturall, for in euery vncomlinesse there must be a certain absurditie and disproportion to nature, and the opinion of the hearer or beholder to make the thing ridiculous.³¹⁸

Consequently, when the buffoon (Shakespeare’s Fool) and the counterfeit fool (Edgar) talk and look foolish, the audience of the 1606 performance most certainly found it entertaining. Obviously, this was a rather indecent sort of

³¹⁶ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 243.

³¹⁷ Warren: *The Folio*, 46.

³¹⁸ Puttenham: *The Arte*, 243–244.

entertainment; yet, it perfectly fits not only the dramatic context but also the historical context of its performance, which perhaps becomes most apparent if we juxtapose the four-line song Edgar and the Fool sing in the Quarto with a passage describing “rime” and musical “concord” in Puttenham’s handbook. Although the text lacks stage instructions, and thus we cannot say for certain the following passage was intended to be sung, its rhythm and jingling rhyme scheme suggest such a performance: “Come ore the broome *Bessy* to mee./ Her boat hath a leake, / and she must not speake, / Why she dares not come, ouer to thee.”³¹⁹ It is also worth remarking that this song could have had topical references and could even have been an indirectly indecent reference to Queen Elizabeth, since it strongly resembles the first verse of William Birch’s 1564 ballad entitled “Song between the Queen’s Majesty and England”: “Come over the bourn, Bessy, come over the bourn, Bessy, Sweet Bessy, come over to me; and I shall thee take, And my dear lady make, Before all that ever I see.”³²⁰ However, *The Arte of English Poesy* associates end rhymes with the common poetry most likely enjoyed by ordinary people in the Christmas season, which would perfectly conform to the circumstances of the 1606 Whitehall performance, and also with the character of a fool in a dramatic context:

Note also that rime or concorde is not commendably vsed both in the end and middle of a verse, vnlesse it be in toyes and trifling Poesies, for it sheweth a certaine lightnesse either of the matter or of the makers head, albeit these common rimers vse it much [...] so on the other side doth the ouer busie and too speedy returne of one maner of tune, too much annoy & as it were glut the eare, vnlesse it be in small & popular Musickes [...] or historicall rimes, made purposely for recreation of the common people at Christmasse diners & brideales, and in tauernes & alehouses and such other places of base resort, also they be vsed in Carols and rounds and such light or lasciuious Poemes, which are commonly more commodiously vttered by these buffons or vices in playes then by any other person.³²¹

As a result, the very fact that the song cited above was omitted from the Folio shows how textual alternations like this could turn the “chronicle historie,” as it was recorded in the 1608 Quarto, into a less amusing yet more tragically decent piece of writing.

To summarize, the mock trial scene contains all the indecent and unmannerly elements that the 1606 courtly audience would have found entertaining. While modern adaptations provide various interpretations of *King Lear* which

³¹⁹ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, G3v.

³²⁰ Quoted in the following nineteenth-century critical edition: William Shakespeare: *King Lear*, *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*. Vol 5, ed. Horace Howard Furness, Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1880, 208.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 68–69.

very often reflect a particular director's idea, Puttenham helps philologists reconstruct an assumed Early Modern "horizon of expectations"³²² against which the validity of historical readings of Shakespearean drama can be plausibly tested. Therefore, a close reading of the mock trial scene of the 1608 *King Lear* Quarto and *The Arte of English Poesy* seems to reveal many distinctly contemporaneous and, in this case, even entertaining features of Shakespeare's text creation, an understanding of which could enhance twenty-first century readings of the play.

The two scenes discussed in this chapter offer clear examples of the Early Modern idea of mannerly public behavior, since one of them, the love contest scene, stages a royal ceremony and the other, the mock trial scene, imitates the setting of a court trial. An examination of the relationships between these scenes and contemporaneous standards of courtly behavior reveals that the Shakespearean text challenges the ideas of the assumed audience concerning acceptable public speech and behavior as presented in the relevant chapters of Puttenham's work. From a poetical point of view, this chapter has also drawn attention to Shakespeare's knowledge of and familiarity with the characteristics of figurative speech as described in *The Arte of English Poesie*. Since this work lists various tropes and figures of speech that were widely known in the Early Modern period, their use alone would not prove that he was familiar with this book. But the textual connection between *King Lear* and *The Arte of English Poesie* is primarily perceivable through the complementary nature of the tropes used in the Shakespearean text and their non-conventional explanation in Puttenham's book, for instance in the case of hyperbole. This connection could also be traced by pointing out the similarities between the phrasing used by the two authors, which are quite striking, especially when the mock trial scene is juxtaposed with Puttenham's chapter describing decent behavior. Furthermore, my examination of the microtextual layers of the play reveals that the characters' diction is permeated with topical references, and some of the tropes used in the text, for instance the heart and the hand, echo the language of contemporaneous public speeches. Of the many aspects of figurative language, the next chapter will focus on the corporeal images of the 1608 Quarto and their relationship to Jacobean public discourses discussing various topical matters concerning governance of the Early Modern body politic.

³²² This term is meant in the Jaussian sense to describe the criteria that modern readers can assume in order to judge a piece of writing deriving from a certain period other than that of the reader's age. Cf. Hans Robert Jauss: *Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory*, in Hans Robert Jauss: *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1982, 23.

APPENDIX.

THE CONFLATED TEXTS OF THE 1608 QUARTO AND THE FOLIO

Scena Sexta.

Enter Kent, and Gloucester, Lear, Foole and Tom.

GLO. Heere is better then the open ayre, take it thankfully: I will peece out the comfort with what addition I can: I will not be long from you. *Exit.*

KENT. All the powre of his wits, haue giuen way to his impatience: the Gods reward / deserue your kindnesse. *Enter Lear, Edgar, and Foole.*

EDG. *Fraterretto* cals me, and tells me *Nero* is an Angler in the Lake of Darknesse: pray Innocent, and beware the foule Fiend.

FOOLE. Prythee Nunkle tell me, whether a madman be a Gentleman, or a Yeoman.

LEAR. A King, a King.

FOOLE. No, he's a Yeoman, that ha's a Gentleman to his Sonne: for hee's a mad Yeoman that sees his Sonne a Gentleman before him.

LEAR. To haue a thousand with red burning spits Come hizzing in vpon 'em.

EDG. *The foul fiend bites my back,*

FOOLE. He's mad, that trusts in the tamenes of a Wolfe, a horses health, a boyes loue, or a whores oath.

LEAR. It shalbe done, I wil arraigne them straight,

Come, sit thou here most learned Iustice

Thou sapient sir sit here, no you shee Foxes-

EDG. Looke where he stands and glars, wanst thou eyes, at

trial madam come ore the broome *Bessy* to mee.

FOOLE. Her boat hath a leake, and she must not speake, Why she dares not come, ouer to thee.

EDG. The foul fiend haüts poore *Tom* in the voyce of a nightingale,

Hoppedance cries in *Toms* belly for two white herring,

Croke not black Angell, I haue no foode for thee.

KENT. How doe you sir? Stand you not so amazd, will you lie downe and rest vpon the cushings?

LEAR. Ill see their triall first, bring in their euidence, thou robbed man of Iustice take thy place, & thou his yokefellow of equity, bench by his side, you are ot'h commission, sit you too.

EDG. Let vs deale iustly sleepest or wakest thou iolly shepheard,

Thy sheep be in the corne, and for one blast of thy minikin

Mouth, thy sheepe shall take no harme, Pur the cat is gray.

LEAR. Arraigne her first tis *Gonoril*, I here take my oath before this honorable assembly kickt the poore king her father.

FOOLE. Come hither mistrisse is your name *Gonorill*.

LEAR. She cannot deny it.

FOOLE. Cry you mercy I tooke you for a ioine stoole.

LEAR. And heres another whose warpt lookes proclaime,

What store her hart is made an, stop her there,

Armes, armes, sword fire, corruption in the place,

False Iusticer why hast thou let her scape.

EDG. Blesse thy fiue wits.

KENT. O pitty: Sir, where is the patience now That you so oft haue boasted
to retaine?

EDG. My teares begin to take his part so much,

They marre my counterfetting.

LEAR. The little dogges, and all;

Trey, Blanch, and Sweet-heart: see, they barke at me.

EDG. Tom, will throw his head at them: Auaunt you

Curres, be thy mouth or blacke or white:

Tooth that poysons if it bite:

Mastiffe, Grey-hound, Mongrill, Grim,

Hound or Spaniell, Brache, or Hym:

Or Bobtaile tight, or Troudle taile,

Tom will make him weepe and waile,

For with throwing thus my head;

Dogs leapt the hatch, and all are fled.

Do, de, de, de: sese: / loudla doodla Come, march to Wakes and Fayres,

And Market Townes: poore Tom thy horne is dry,

LEAR. Then let them Anatomize *Regan*: See what breeds about

her heart. Is there any cause in Nature that makes these hard-hearts /
hardnes.

You sir, I entertaine for one of my hundred;

only, I do not like the fashion of your garments. You will say
they are Persian attire; but let them bee chang'd.

Enter Gloster.

KENT. Now good my Lord, lye heere, and rest awhile.

LEAR. Make no noise, make no noise, draw the Curtaines: so, so, so

wee'l go to Supper i'th' morning, so, so, so,

Enter Gloster.

FOOLE. And Ile go to bed at noone.

GLO. Come hither Friend: Where is the King my Master?

KENT. Here Sir, but trouble him not, his wits are gon.

GLO. Good friend, I prythee take him in thy armes;

I haue ore-heard a plot of death vpon him:

There is a Litter ready, lay him in't,

And driue toward Douer friend, where thou shalt meete

Both welcome, and protection. Take vp thy Master,

If thou should'st dally halfe an houre, his life

With thine, and all that offer to defend him,

Stand in assured losse. Take vp, **take vp**, / **the King**
 And follow me, that will to some prouision
 Giue thee quicke conduct.

KENT. Oppressed nature sleepes,
 This rest might yet haue balmed thy broken sinews,
 Which if conuenience will not alow stand in hard cure,
 Come helpe to beare thy maister, thou must not stay behind.

GLO. Come, come, away.

Exit. Exeunt.

EDG. When we our betters see bearing our woes: we scarcely
 Thinke, our miseries, our foes.
 Who alone suffers suffers, most it'h mind,
 Leauing free things and happy showes behind,
 But then the mind much sufferance doth or'e scip,
 When griefe hath mates, and bearing fellowship:
 How light and portable my paine seemes now,
 When that which makes me bend makes the king bow.
 He childed as I fathered, *Tom*, away,
 Marke the high noyses and thy selfe bewray,
 When false opinion whose wrong thoughts defiles thee,
 In thy iust prooffe repeals and reconciles thee,
 What will hap more to night, safe scape the King, Lurke, lurke.

THE INFLUENCE OF EARLY MODERN THEORIES OF GOVERNANCE: CORPOREAL IMAGES AND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE BODY POLITIC IN THE 1608 QUARTO

One of the conclusions I drew in the previous chapter was that certain rhetorical figures defining the relationship between the characters during the public ceremony of the love contest scene in the 1608 *Pied Bull Quarto* evoke the “body politic,” a metaphoric expression denoting the Early Modern idea of the state. Extending this thread of thought, this chapter focuses on the use of corporeal or body-related metaphors throughout the play and argues that the initial references to the human body develop into a whole image cluster. This series of rethorical figures signals the social function of the characters, which allows for an “anthropomorphic mapping”³²³ of the characters’ relation to the monarch.

Since the scope of this chapter extends to the interpretation and literary representation of various Early Modern notions related to the sociopolitical aspects of royal power, it seems sensible to consider briefly the basic concepts of governance in the Jacobean period, especially in the mediated forms in which they appeared on the Early Modern stage.³²⁴ Shakespearean drama offers many answers to the question concerning what the ideal monarch was like in the first decade of seventeenth-century England, but these answers originate from two main principles of acceptable rulership.³²⁵ One of them is based on the medieval idea that political authority derives from God, whereas the

³²³ I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor Tibor Fabiny for nurturing my thoughts with this expression, which I believe was his own invention.

³²⁴ My short summary is based on the following two articles: Michael Hattaway: *Tragedy and Political Authority*, in Claire Elizabeth McEachern (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, 105–122; and György Endre Szőnyi: *Matching the “Falles of Princes” and “Machiavell.” Tradition and Subversion in the Historiography and Iconography of Shakespeare’s Histories*, in György E. Szőnyi–Rowland Wymmer (eds.): *The Iconography of Power. Ideas and Images of Rulership on the English Renaissance Stage*, Szeged, JATE Press, 2000, 5–31.

³²⁵ Szőnyi: *Matching*, 7.

other, the origin of which is ascribed to Renaissance political historians like Machiavelli, claims that royal power is rooted in the construction of the state and the means whereby the monarch had obtained the crown in his "personal appropriateness." Early Modern drama offers a large variety of characters who embody these principles, and *King Lear* is an excellent example of this. It has become a commonplace in Shakespearean criticism to say that Lear represents a medieval monarch whose rule is based on the divine right of kingship, whereas Edmund, as a stage Machiavel,³²⁶ stands for the stereotype of the politician who seeks power through merit instead of inheritance. Significantly, in the stage directions of the 1608 Quarto, Edmund is always mentioned as "Bastard," which strengthens the impression that he is a social misfit in the hierarchical system of the kingdom. This is the position from which he intends to move, confessing to the audience, "Let me if not by birth, haue lands by wit, / All with me's meete, that I can fashion fit."³²⁷ His insatiable lust for power drives him to commit adultery with Lear's elder daughters in order to establish a kingdom to his own liking, and in the end, he almost takes the monarch's position. Commenting on whether Lear and Cordelia should receive Albany's mercy, his diction resembles that of a king: "The battaile done, and they within our power / Shall neuer see his pardon, for my state / stands on me to defend, not to debate."³²⁸

Since this chapter investigates poetic matters, more precisely the representation of the Early Modern body politic and its relationship to the corporeal images of the 1608 Quarto of *King Lear*, a line of thought focusing on the assumed influence of Nicolo Machiavelli's writings on dramatic characters would constitute a digression from the main subject. Therefore, this chapter returns to the claim discussed in the previous one, namely that certain rhetorical tropes of the ceremonial scene at the beginning of the play figuratively relate to the idea of the Early Modern body politic, especially in the case of Cordelia and Kent.

Prominent scholars³²⁹ have noticed that the outstanding feature of the play's imagery is the dominance of references to the human body as a whole and also

³²⁶ The stock character of the stage Machiavel is not directly based on Nicolo Machiavelli's writings but rather embodies all the preconceptions of him that were circulating in Early Modern England. It was only in 1637 that his *Discourses* and then in 1610 that his *Prince* were translated and published in English. Before these dates, his books were available only in the editions that were circulating on the continent. For a detailed discussion of his reception history in England see Victoria Kahn: English Machiavellism, in Victoria Kahn: *Machiavellian Rhetoric from the Counter-reformation to Milton*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1994, 85–166.

³²⁷ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. C3r.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, sig. K3v.

³²⁹ Caroline Spurgeon and most recently David Hillman have studied and pointed out the significance of corporeal images in *King Lear*, but others, like John Erskine Hankins, also examined the figurative use of the body in general in Shakespeare's plays. Caroline F. E. Spurgeon: *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us*, Cambridge, Cambridge University

to its parts or members. Having examined the Shakespeare oeuvre in order to collect the leading motives of each play, Caroline Spurgeon concludes that the dominant image in *King Lear* is “a human body in anguished movement” or “the sense of bodily movement and strain.”³³⁰ David Hillman also remarked that the play belongs to a group of Shakespeare’s tragedies that “are preoccupied with an imagination of the visceral interior of the human body.”³³¹

Although Shakespearean scholarship today tends to turn to the references concerning Lear’s physical body, this chapter sides with critics like Mary Axton, Albert Rolls, and Northrop Frye, who link *King Lear* with certain Early Modern political concepts based on the analogy between the state and the human body.³³² In what follows, this chapter first summarizes the presence of the corporeal images³³³ in contemporaneous governance theories and then offers a reading of the 1608 Quarto of *King Lear* that examines these corporeal images and considers the ways in which they could be said to call attention to the notion of the “organic conception of the state.”

CORPOREAL IMAGES IN EARLY MODERN THEORIES OF GOVERNANCE

In the field of political science, the metaphor of the “body politic” has been widely used in many alternations since Ancient times until the seventeenth century to describe the hierarchical structure of society as if it were a human body consisting of separate members with specific functions which serve the needs of the whole organism. The application of such analogical patterns of thinking, or as W. R. Elton calls them, “conceptual modes,”³³⁴ was a typical feature of Early Modern ideas on kingship. As E. M. W. Tillyard noted, Renaissance men regarded the world as an enormous web of correspondences and believed that understanding the internal structure and the prevailing

Press, 1958; David Hillman: *Visceral Knowledge*, in David Hillman–Carla Mazzio (eds.): *The Body in Parts. Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, New York–London, Routledge, 1997, 81–106; John Erskine Hankins: *Backgrounds of Shakespeare’s Thought*, Hassocks, Sussex, The Harvest Press, 1978.

³³⁰ Spurgeon: *Shakespeare’s Imagery*, 339.

³³¹ Hillman: *Visceral Knowledge*, 81.

³³² This is why, for instance, Kent’s reference to Edmund’s handsome body “I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper” (sig. B1r) becomes irrelevant to my perspective, as the words “proper issue” refer to the character’s physical qualities. Similarly, Lear’s figurative reference to the female genitalia as the “sulphury pit” (sig. I3v) is unrelated to the main concern of this chapter.

³³³ I use the word “image,” as defined by Caroline Spurgeon, to cover “every kind of simile and metaphor” that fits “the purpose of allegory” and connotes “any and every imaginative picture or other experience” Spurgeon: *Shakespeare’s Imagery*, 5.

³³⁴ W. R. Elton: *Shakespeare and the Thought of his Age*, in Stanley Wells (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Studies*, Cambridge–New York, Cambridge University Press, 1986, 17.

forces of the macrocosm, the globe, would lead to comprehension of the microcosm, as they imagined the human world, since these two were closely related.³³⁵ This perception of the political system of the state as an organism like the human body thus reflects the interrelated nature of the components of the Early Modern world.

David George Hale, who vividly describes both its history and embedding in the Early Modern intellectual milieu,³³⁶ explains that, although by the Restoration the "body politic" had become a dead metaphor denoting the state, during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I it was widely used in public discourses for various purposes, for instance, "to defend and attack the established church, to promote order and obedience to secular rules, and to criticize political and economic abuses."³³⁷

In academic works, however, discussions concerning the body politic involve at least two closely related notions which are rooted in Ancient sources but are distinct in origin. While the "two bodies" theory focuses mainly on the twofold nature of the monarch's personality, the organic conception of the state is concerned with the function of the different members of society in its hierarchical structure.

THE KING'S TWO BODIES

One of the central questions for lawyers in sixteenth-century England was to understand both the reason and implication of the paradox that the person of the monarch, who was not only a sacred man representing God on earth but also a human being who, although mortal, could maintain the continuity of the Crown. The most obvious way of developing a proper legal jargon was to borrow terms from the field of theology. This became particularly urgent after Henry VIII, by the Act of Supremacy separating the Church of England from the Catholic Church of Rome, became the leader of both the clerical and the sociopolitical structure of the kingdom. The theory that lawyers started to refer to as "the King's two bodies" was in fact the secularization of the Medieval concept of "chriptomimesis." This theological idea states that the King is the personification of Christ on earth, and he has a similar, two-fold nature ("gemina persona"): in addition to having an earthly existence as a man, he also has a "character angelicus."³³⁸ In other words, the King and Christ have "two substances" in common, as they are "human by nature,

³³⁵ E. M. W. Tillyard: *The Elizabethan World Picture*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1956, 89.

³³⁶ David George Hale: *The Body Politic. A Political Metaphor in Renaissance English Literature*, The Hague-Paris, Mouton, 1971.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

³³⁸ W. R. Elton: *King Lear and the Gods*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1988, 5.

but divine by grace and by consecration.”³³⁹ In order to separate Christ’s two bodies, Carolingian theologians developed two terms: the “corpus naturale” referred to the Eucharist, the physical presence of Christ, whereas the “corpus mysticum” signified the “organized body of the Christian community.”³⁴⁰ For several centuries, European monarchs and Rome would argue whether the “corpus mysticum” referred to the Christian community led by the Pope or the group of subjects under the dominance of a certain prince. Since the Church declared itself not only as an ecclesiastical authority but also a political and legal entity, the secular application of this notion soon became inevitable. In England, the sharp distinction between the Church’s and the King’s authority became even more distinct after the Act of Supremacy, by which Henry VIII replaced the Pope as head of the English Church and therefore subordinated the “corpus mysticum” to his own “corpus politicum.”³⁴¹

During Queen Elizabeth’s reign, out of fear of an absolutist monarch, a group of Catholic lawyers including Anthony Brown, William Rastel, and Edmund Plowden used a secular version of the two bodies concept to highlight the difference between the legal status of an ordinary subject and a monarch and also to find legal grounds for preventing the Queen from strengthening her power too much. The book that records their ideas was published in 1588 under the title *Les Commentaries ou Reports de Edmund Plowden*.³⁴² Their arguments derived from their interpretation of the case of the Duchy of Lancaster,³⁴³ which dealt with the Queen’s intention to revise Edward VI’s donations of Dutchy land in order to grant it to one of her favorites. Commenting upon this legal debate, Edmund Plowden argues that the King incorporates two clearly distinguishable but non-separable bodies in himself. One of them, which stands for the monarch’s mortal and passionate self, he calls the “Body natural,” which is “subject to all Infinities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People.”³⁴⁴ The “Body politic,” on the other hand, is an immortal essence that cannot be seen, yet it is void of all the deficiencies by which the other one is weakened. Since this second body is more perfect

³³⁹ Ernst H. Kantorowitz: *The King’s Two Bodies: a Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957, 77.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 196.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 229.

³⁴² Ibid., 7–24.

³⁴³ The Queen’s lawyers wanted to claim Edward’s grant invalid on the basis of the fact that the king was underage or, in their words, a “minor” when he had donated this piece of land, which he was not entitled to do in accordance with ordinary common law. On the other hand, common lawyers like Rastell and Browne claimed that the Queen’s arguments were insufficient, since in their view, this law banning minors from donating land applied only to ordinary people, whereas the king possessed not only a body natural but also a body politic, and the latter was never subject to the restrictions of age. Axton: *The Queen’s*, 16–17.

³⁴⁴ Plowden in Kantorowitz: *The King’s*, 7.

than the other, it is superior to the "Body natural," and, as a general rule, "what the King does in his Body politic cannot be frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body."³⁴⁵ However, these two bodies were inseparable, and they could not exist on their own, but were united in the person of the King: "Notwithstanding that these two Bodies are at one Time conjoined together, yet the Capacity of the one does not confound that of the other, but they remain distinct Capacities. Ergo the Body natural and the Body politic are not distinct, but united, and as one Body."³⁴⁶ Thus, the main function of the Body politic is to maintain the continuity of the Crown, regardless of the death of an individual King or Queen: whenever a monarch passes away, only his or her Body natural dies, and the Body politic is transferred or "demised" to the new monarch's Body natural.³⁴⁷ From a legal aspect, this idea also implies that the actual monarch and his or her predecessors and successors are the same entities or "souls" successively inhabiting the same "body," and that a king, therefore, can never actually die.³⁴⁸

Trying to prove Mary, Queen of Scots' right to the English throne, the aforementioned group of Catholic lawyers including Plowden, Browne, and Rastell argued that, regardless of the common practice of primogeniture, which kept the inheritance of the Crown in the realm of the closest family, succession and inheritance could not be treated as synonymous terms. While an ordinary person having only a Body natural could settle any dispute over his or her heritage by a will, the question of succession did not fall into the same category, as it concerned only monarchs vested with both a Body natural and a Body politic.³⁴⁹

Jacobean lawyers also turned for help to the concept of the body politic when they wanted to strengthen their arguments for the Scottish King, James VI's claim to the English crown. Their ideas were summarized in Edward Forset's treaty *A Comparative Discovrse of the Bodies Natvral and Politique* (1606), which offers "an extended valorization of the sovereign's supreme role in the maintenance of the body politic's health."³⁵⁰ In addition to being the Lord Chief Justice of London,³⁵¹ Forset was also one of the lawyers representing the Crown at the trial of the Gunpowder Plot, so his work provides an excellent example of the royalist attitude and Jacobean discourse of legal writings. Unlike *Plowden's Report*, the *Comparative Discovrse* reveals that, in the Jacobean era,

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 7.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 12.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 13.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 13.

³⁴⁹ Axton: *The Queen's*, 16.

³⁵⁰ Jonathan Gil Harris: *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic. Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 57–58.

³⁵¹ Albert Rolls: *The Theory of the King's Two Bodies in the Age of Shakespeare*, Lewiston, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000, 40.

emphasis did not fall on the “gemina persona” of the monarch but rather on the anthropomorphic nature of the kingdom, which needs only one head, which was obviously King James. It is worth paying attention to this line of thought in Edward Forset’s wording:

Let vs imagine a bodie so monstrous, as whereunto two heads were at once affixed, shall not that bodie receiue much damage by the diuision and confusion of those two heads? must not the bodie in that case eithr be diuided by alootting of one side to the one, and the other side to the other head? [...] What we as by fiction doe imagine might be done in the naturall bodie: Man (that imagineth nothing but euill) and therefore can produce more prodigious errours than nature in her escapes hath euer patterned, hath indeed often brought to passé (though with most cursed successe) in the bodie politique. Haue we not had within this one land of England, the hideous Heptarchie of seuen heads at once? nay hath not the whole Iland of *Britania*, being a bodie perfectly shaped, rounded, and bounded with an inuironing sea, beene a long time thus disseuered, and disfigured by that vnluckie dualitie the author of diuision? [...] Here I find the matter of Vnion to lye so full in my way, that euen it stoppeth my passage, forcing me (notwithstanding the exact handling thereof by others) to giue it some little touch by the addition of prooffe from these my comparisons also: for doubtlesse, if in the former times two heads caused the diuiding and halfeing of the bodie; the same reason now requireth, that this one so virtuous and powerfull head should reunite and draw againe into one, the distracted and long repurgning parts.³⁵²

Even King James applied rhetoric similar to the language found in legal treaties in his speeches in which he referred to himself as the head and his people as the body, by which rather obviously he merged the “King’s two bodies” theory with the organic conception of state. As the aforementioned Albert Rolls argues, when James regards himself as the head of a community which also contains the body of the state, he rejects the notion that he is simply a member of the body and subordinates the whole community to his leadership.

For James, the King is the embodiment of the state, and the king is the head of a state which simultaneously contains that Body. James has discarded the distinction between the king as head and the King as Body, and bypassed the whole problem

³⁵² Edward Forset: *A Comparative Discovrse of the Bodies Natvral and Politique. Wherein out of the Principles of Nature, is set forth the true forme of a Commonweale, with the dutie of Subiects, and the right of the Soueraigne: together with many good points of Politicall learning, mentioned in a Briefe after the Preface*, London, printed for Iohn Bill, 1606, 57–59.

of dealing with the difference between the two bodies. His personal will has been collapsed into his political will, and the law has been vested in his natural and body politic.³⁵³

Unfortunately, Rolls does not apply his findings concerning Jacobean public discourse to a detailed discussion of *King Lear*. Rather, he simply adopts Reginald Armstrong Foakes' interpretation of the play and remarks that it denies "the metaphysical connection of the king with state, of the father with the family, and of God with the cosmos."³⁵⁴

Although Kantorowitz, Axton and Rolls have made considerable contributions to twentieth-century readers' understandings of the King's Two Bodies theory and its representation in Shakespeare's age, because of their narrow focus, they marginalized the relevance of another tradition, which became known in the secondary literature as the organic conception of the state.

THE ORGANIC CONCEPTION OF THE STATE

In the late Middle Ages, a doctrine spread all over Europe that identified the Christian community as a corporative and organic structure and defined its internal hierarchy as analogous to the human body. Even before its Christian application, this anthropomorphic analogy for the community had been present in intellectual thinking since Ancient times. The expression "the organic conception of the state" comes from the book *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle*, in which Ernest Barker, a prominent British political scientist, defines its meaning in the following manner: "An organism is a unity, where each member is an instrument (or *organon*) in the general plan; where each member has its appointed purpose or function (*ergon*); where each member can only act, and be understood, and indeed exist, through the end and aim of the whole. But such is the unity of the State and such is the relation of the individual to the State: the State is an organism and its citizens are its members."³⁵⁵

David George Hale maintains that the first written record that testifies to the application of this anthropomorphic analogy is the following passage in Isocrates' *Areopagiticus* from 355 B.C.:

³⁵³ Rolls: *The Theory*, 72. The author intentionally differentiates "king" with a small initial, meaning the person who is only a member of the body politic (thus emphasizing the body natural side of his twofold nature), from the "King" with capital letter, which refers to the body politic, including the whole realm of the people. Cf. *ibid.*, 59.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 252.

³⁵⁵ Barker cited in Leonard Barkan: *Nature's Work of Art. The Human Body as Image of the World*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1975, 62.

For the soul of a state is nothing else than its polity, having as much power over it as does the mind over the body; for it is this which deliberates upon all questions, seeking to preserve what is good and to ward off what is disastrous; and it is this which of necessity assimilates to its own nature the laws, the public orators and the private citizens; and all the members of the state must fare well or ill according to the kind of polity under which they live.³⁵⁶

The idea of an anthropomorphic description of society also penetrates the writings of classical Greek philosophers; its traces can easily be detected in Plato's *Republic* and *The Laws*, but it was Aristotle who in his *Politics* distinctly articulated the organic nature of the state, meaning that society is natural and not artificially created, and he emphasized that the individual's relationship to society is analogous to the relationship of the members of the human body to the body itself:

it is evident that the state is a creature of nature and that man is by nature a political animal. Thus the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part; for example if the whole body be destroyed, there will be no foot or hand... The proof that the state is a creature of nature and prior to the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state. (*Politics* 1253a I, 4-5)³⁵⁷

Inheriting this anthropomorphic view from the Greek authors, the Roman Stoics also applied the idea of defining the individual's position in society as if they were members of a human body, as the following passage from Cicero's treatise testifies:

As, supposing each member of the body was so disposed as to think it could be well if it should draw to itself the health of the adjacent member, it is inevitable that the whole body would be debilitated and would perish; so if each of us should seize for himself the interests of another, and wrest whatever he could from each for the sake of his own emolument, the necessary consequence is, that human society and community would be overturned. (*De Officiis* 3.5.22-23)³⁵⁸

Undoubtedly, the earliest Christian application of the body image to the community of those who believed in Christ appears in the New Testament, in Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

³⁵⁶ Isocrates cited in Hale: *The Body Politic*, 19.

³⁵⁷ Aristotle cited in *ibid.*, 21.

³⁵⁸ Cicero cited in *ibid.*, 25.

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. [...] For the body is not one member, but many. / If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? / And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? / If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? / But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. [...] And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. / Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. (1Cor 12:12-27)

Saint Paul's image of the "mystical body" of Christ comprising the Christian community proved an excellent manifestation of the Church's interest in order to support the authority of religious institutions as opposed to the worldly and political ones. As the influence of the Church started growing even in political affairs, the practice of applying the Pauline corporeal analogy to the description of society also became widespread. As Paul Archambault points out, Pope Gregory VII was the first to state emphatically that "the body politic [is] co-extensive with the body mystical,"³⁵⁹ a claim which set off a series of debates concerning who should rule over this body: the representative of the temporal power or divine power.

In England, with the Act of Supremacy, Henry VIII redefined the meaning of this universal "mystical body" and established the special religious and political unity of "the Church *of* England as contrasted to the Church *in* England."³⁶⁰ He took advantage of the organic analogy for his own political interest and applied it in a more mundane context, claiming, "this realm of England is an empire... governed by one Supreme Head and King... unto whom a body politic, compact of all sorts and degrees of people... be bounden and owe to bear next to God a natural and humble obedience."³⁶¹ In the early Tudor period, many well-known authors relied on the organic analogy when discussing various matters related to the state. The corporeal imagery appears in the works of Thomas More, Sir Thomas Elyot, John Fisher, as well as for instance in the sermons of Stephen Gardiner and Thomas Starkey.³⁶² Even in the second half of the sixteenth century, some traces of this anthropomorphic analogy could be found in homilies that were written with the purpose of

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 26.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 48.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 48.

³⁶² For a detailed discussion of this period see *ibid.*, 48–68. Moreover, as Noemi Najbauer highlights, even John Donne, court preacher to King James, used the state as body imagery to ensure stability in society. Noémi Mária Najbauer: "The Art of Salvation, is but the Art of Memory": *Memory as Art and Devotion in the Sermons of John Donne*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Budapest, 2010, 189–193.

exhorting subjects to obey their king's wishes as they obey God and never to commit the sin of rebellion against his majesty. As *An Exhortation to Obedience* states: "That is Gods ordinaunce, Gods commaundment and Gods holy will, that the whole body of every realme and all the members and partes of the same shalbe subject to their hed, their kynge."³⁶³

Although Henry VIII's institutional reform itself was rather unexpected, the public discourse applying the anthropomorphic analogy to legitimize it was not unprecedented in England at all. The comparison of the structure of society to the human body in English political thinking springs directly from the intellectual legacy of the twelfth-century English bishop, John of Salisbury. Instead of relying on the Pauline image of the "corpus mysticum" or Aristotle's notion of society as a human organism, he developed a remarkably comprehensive description of the state in his work entitled *Policratici sive de Nugis Curialium et Vestigiis Philosophorum*, or, in short, *Policraticus*, first published in 1159.³⁶⁴ His alleged source was Plutarch's *Institutio Traiani* but apart from Salisbury's reference, there is no available record to support the existence of Plutarch's work. Today, the *Policraticus* is an excellent medieval "compendium of all the lore surrounding the organic theory of the State,"³⁶⁵ which in fact remained influential for many centuries. According to Ernst Robert Curtius, it was printed all over Europe at least eight times between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.³⁶⁶ In the eight books of his work, John of Salisbury investigates how the individual can preserve his or her liberty and chance of maintaining a pleasant way of life by fulfilling a function in the organic body of the state. There is more at risk here than individual happiness. Similar to how illness attacks the human body, if any member of society falls sick, this makes the whole body unable to function properly; it therefore follows that preservation of the mutually beneficial cooperation of the individual members of society serves the interests of the whole community. *Policraticus* presents three alternations of the organic concept, the first of which describes the fully developed analogy as follows:

³⁶³ Ronald B. Bond (ed.): *Certain Sermons and Homilies (1547) and A Homily Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion (1570)*, Toronto, Buffalo, London, Toronto University Press, 1987, 169.

³⁶⁴ This work, originally written in Latin, has never been translated into English in its entirety. Only selections from some of the books have been published in English translation. In academic circles, the twentieth-century critical edition of the Latin original is cited most often, as it is widely accepted to be the most reliable version: Joannis Saresberiensis: *Policraticus Sive de Nugis Curialium et Vestigiis Philosophorum*, ed. Clement C. I. Webb, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1909.

³⁶⁵ Barkan: *Nature's Work*, 72.

³⁶⁶ Ernst Robert Curtius: *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1973, 140.

A commonwealth, according to Plutarch, is a certain body which is endowed with life by the benefit of divine favor, which acts at the prompting of the highest equity, and is ruled by what may be called the moderating power of reason [...]. And those who preside over the practice of religion should be looked up to and venerated as the soul of the body [...] The place of the head in the body of the commonwealth is filled by the prince, who is subject only to God and to those who exercise His office and represent Him on earth, even as in the human body the head is quickened and governed by the soul. The place of the heart is filled by the Senate, from which proceeds the initiation of good works and ill. The duties of eyes, ears, and tongue are claimed by the judges and governors of provinces. Officials and soldiers correspond to the hands. Those who always attend upon the prince are likened to the sides. Financial officers and keepers [...] may be compared with the stomach and intestines. [...] The husbandmen correspond to the feet, which always cleave to the soil, and need the more especially the care and foresight of the head."³⁶⁷

Obviously, in Salisbury's system, the Prince, the head, is subordinated to the clergy, which the analogy identifies with the soul of the body. Although the description of social order presented in *Policraticus* marked the beginning of an extremely popular tradition in English political treatises, this function of the Church gradually faded away as English monarchs started to distance the government of the country from the clerical powers.³⁶⁸

In the last book of *Policraticus*, Salisbury also described the negative counterpart of the organic analogy applied to the kingdom of the tyrant imitating the wickedness of the devil:

³⁶⁷ John of Salisbury: *The statesman's book of John of Salisbury, being the fourth, fifth, and sixth books, and selections from the seventh and eighth books of the Policraticus*, trans. John Dickenson, New York, Russell & Russel, 1963, 64–65. Partly since Shakespeare's contemporaries most certainly used the Latin text as a reference and partly for the sake of philological precision, I provide the quotes from the 1909 critical edition of the Latin original as well. "Est autem Respublica, sicut Plutarcho placet, corpus quoddam, quod divini muneris beneficio animator, et summae aequitatis agitur nutu, et regitur quodam moderamine rationis [...] Illos vero, qui religionis cultui praesunt, quasi animam corporis suspisere et venerari oportet [...] Princeps vero capitis in Republica obtinet locum, uni subjectus Deo, et his qui vices illius agunt in terries, quoniam et in humano corpore, ab anima vegetatur caput et regitur. Cordis locum senatus obtinet, a quo bonorum operum et malorum procedunt initia. Oculorum, aurium, et linguae official, sibi vindicant iudices et praesides provinciarum. Officiales et milites manibus coaptantur. Qui semper assistant principi, lateribus assimilantur. Quaestores et commentarienses [...] ad ventis et intestinorum refert imaginem. Quae si immensa aviditate congesserint et congesta tenacious reservaverint, innumerabiles et incurabiles generant morbos, ut vitio eorum totius corporis ruina immineat. Pedibus vero solo jugiter inhaerentibus, agricolae coaptantur, quibus capitis providential tanto magis necessaria est." Saresberiensis: *Policraticus*, I., 282–283.

³⁶⁸ Rolls: *The Theory*, 78.

For the commonwealth of the ungodly has also its head and members, and strives to correspond, as it were, to the civil institutions of a legitimate commonwealth. The tyrant who is its head is the likeness of the devil; its soul consists of heretical, schismatic, and sacrilegious priests, and, to use the language of Plutarch, prefects of religion who wage war on the law of the Lord; its heart of unrighteous counsellors is like a senate of iniquity; its eyes, ears, tongue, and unarmed hand are unjust judges, laws and officials; its armed hand consists of soldiers of violence whom Cicero calls brigands; its feet are those who in the humbler walks of life go against the precepts of the Lord and His lawful institutions.³⁶⁹

The third alternation of the organic conception of the state recalls Menenius Agrippa's well-known fable³⁷⁰ on the rebellion of the organs against the belly.³⁷¹ This latter version differs considerably from the other two, since instead of referring to the same organs, it leaves out the head and the soul, which have central functions in the previous two variants. Nevertheless, in 1605, around the time of the inception of *King Lear*, William Camden published his *Remaines of a Greater Worke, Concerning Britainen*, in which there is a passage retelling in English the fable found in *Policraticus* nearly word for word: "All the members of the body conspired against the stomacke, as against the swallowing gulfe of all their labors; for whereas the eies beheld, the eares heard, the handes labored, the feet traveled, the tongue spake, and all partes performed their functions, onely the stomacke lay ydle and consumed all [...] Therefore they all with one accord desired the advise of the Heart..."³⁷²

William Camden's work is significant here because it must have served as a pretext for act one, scene one of *Coriolanus*, a play that Shakespeare must have written more or less at the same time as *King Lear*.³⁷³ Although

³⁶⁹ John of Salisbury: *The statesman's book*, 339. "Habet enim et res publica impiorum caput et membra sua, et quasi ciuilibus institutis legitima rei publicae nititur esse conformis. Caput ergo eius tyrannus est imago diaboli; anima heretici scismatici sacrilegi sacerdotes et, ut uerbo Plutarchi utar, praefecti religionis, impugnantes legem Domini; cor consiliarii impii, quasi senatus iniquitatis; oculi, aures, lingua, manus inermis, iudices et leges, officiales iniusti; manus armata, milites uiolenti, quos Cicero latrones appellat; pedes qui in ipsis humilioribus negotiis praeceptis Domini et legitimis institutis aduersantur." Saresberiensis: *Policraticus*, II. 348–349.

³⁷⁰ Menenius Agrippa was a Roman nobleman who recalled an originally Aesopic fable to stop a plebeian rebellion against the Senate. See Hale: *The Body Politic*, 27.

³⁷¹ Saresberiensis: *Policraticus*, I. 625.

³⁷² William Camden: *Remaines of a Greater Work Concerning Britaine, the inhabitants thereof, their Languages, Names, Surnames, Empreses, Wise Speeches, Poësies, and Epitaphes*, London, printed by G. E., 1605, 199.

³⁷³ The dates of inception in the case of the plays are still under debate. The earliest date mentioned for *King Lear* is 1605 based on its first entry in the Stationers' Register. As for *Coriolanus*, in his introduction to the Arden Shakespeare edition of the play, Philip Brockbank argues that it could have been written anytime between 1605 and 1610. William, Shakespeare: *Coriolanus*, ed. Philip Brockbank, The Arden Shakespeare. Second series, London–New York, Routledge, 1994, 27.

Shakespeare could have accessed this fable from different sources,³⁷⁴ according to Kenneth Muir, the most probable source was William Camden's *Remaines*, the traces of which scholars have detected in *King Lear*.³⁷⁵ But even before 1605, Shakespearean drama abounds with examples of images based on the organic analogy of the state. For instance, King Henry V summons his parliament with the following words: "Now call we our high court of parliament, / And let us choose such limbs of noble counsel / That the great body of our state may go / In equal rank with the best govern'd nation."³⁷⁶ Or Laertes' wording may also be significant when he says of Hamlet, "on his choice depends / The sanity and health of this whole state. / And therefore must his choice be circumscrib'd / Unto the voice and yielding of that body / Whereof he is the head."³⁷⁷ The image of the diseased body of the state which needs to be cured appears in King Henry IV's diction too: "Then you perceive the body of our kingdom / How foul it is, what rank diseases grow; / And with what danger, near the heart of it"³⁷⁸ as well as in Warwick's answer to him: "It is but as a body yet distemper'd, / Which to his former strength may be restor'd / With good advice and little medicine."³⁷⁹ The number of various corporeal images referring to the state in a context other than Menenius Agrippa's fable seems to suggest that Shakespeare may have also come across the anthropomorphic analogy of the state in other sources, in addition to William Camden's work. For philological reasons, it would be challenging to determine with any degree of certainty whether Shakespeare knew the whole organic conception of the state as it was presented by John of Salisbury, yet there is some evidence that even Shakespeare's contemporaries could have had direct access to the text of *Policraticus*, either in English or in Latin or both.

As for written records still available today, various devotional works which were printed in England in the first decade of the seventeenth century contain direct references to John of Salisbury's book, even if their authors were members of various ranks of the Anglican clergy. For instance, a marginal note in William Averell's pamphlet *A Dyall for dainty Darlings, rockt in the*

³⁷⁴ T.W. Baldwin argues that it was included in a schoolbook entitled *Fabellae Aesopicae* (1573) by Camerarius (*Shakespeare's Small Latin*, 622), while Geoffrey Bullough traces it back to *The Romane Historie of T. Livy* (1600), which was translated into English by Philemon Holland (*Narrative*, 496–497).

³⁷⁵ See Kenneth Muir's comments in the 1997 Arden Shakespeare edition. William Shakespeare: *King Lear*, ed. Reginald Armstrong Foakes, The Arden Shakespeare. Third series, London, Thomson Learning, 1997.

³⁷⁶ *King Henry V.* 5.2.134–137. Shakespeare: *The Arden Shakespeare*, 2000, 423.

³⁷⁷ *Hamlet*, 1.3.20–24. *Ibid.*, 297.

³⁷⁸ *King Henry IV, Part 2.* 3.1.38–40. *Ibid.*, 409.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.1.41–43.

cradle of Security refers to a particular passage on Octavian in *Policraticus*,³⁸⁰ and the sermon collection of George Abbot, the Archbishop of Canterbury, which was published by Richard Field in 1600 with the title *An Exposition vpon the prophet Ionah Contained in certaine sermons, preached in S. Maries church in Oxford*, even cites some passages from John of Salisbury in English.³⁸¹ On the topic of chastity, the Archbishop makes the following remark: “He who liued in a deeper time of darknesse and superstition, that is Sarisburyensis in the fifth of his *Policraticus*, could see definitely and positiuely to determine all his doubts. His words are plaine and direct, and therefore I thinke good to cite them.”³⁸²

In addition to the authors and texts mentioned so far, the wording of some of the writings of Ben Jonson suggests that he was also familiar with John of Salisbury’s work. As Clement C. J. Webb, the person who produced the critical edition of *Policraticus*, points out, even Jonson’s poem *To the memory of my beloved, the Author*, which was published in the 1623 Folio, contains set phases that the poet almost certainly borrowed from John of Salisbury.³⁸³ Leonard Barkan convincingly argues, furthermore, that the images related to the organic conception of the state dominate the “narrative and imagistic structure”³⁸⁴ of *Sejanus His Fall*, Ben Jonson’s play performed in the Jacobean court during the Christmas season of 1603 and 1604, in which, significantly enough, William Shakespeare also acted.³⁸⁵ Still, any contentions concerning the specific nature and the practical details of Shakespeare’s knowledge of *Policraticus* would be mere speculation at the present stage of my research. But Shakespeare cannot have been ignorant of the organic conception of the state and the functions of individual organs, at least as far as he relied on them in *Coriolanus*, and this provides enough ground to involve this analogy in my reading of *King Lear*.

In public discourses during the reign of King James I, the work that most directly relied on this legal tradition was Edward Forset’s 1606 treaty,

³⁸⁰ W. (William) Averell: *A Dyall for dainty Darlings, rockt in the cradle of Securitie. A Glasse for all disobedient Sonnes to looke in. A Myrrour for vertuous Maydes. A Booke right excellent, garnished with many woorthy examples, and learned aucthorities, most needefull for this tyme present*, London, Thomas Hackette, 1584, sig. D2r.

³⁸¹ George Abbot: *An exposition vpon the prophet Ionah Contained in certaine sermons, preached in S. Maries church in Oxford*, 1600, 363, 368, 471.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 552.

³⁸³ For a discussion of the origin of the phrase “insolent Greece,” see: Clement C. J. Webb: The *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury, *Church Quarterly Review* 71 (1911), 312–45.

³⁸⁴ More precisely, Leonard Barkan claims that in *Sejanus* “the characters’ functions in the working of the State are often expressed in terms of their anatomy, so that their identity is reduced to the parts of their bodies which do the State’s work.” See Barkan: *Nature’s Work*, 90.

³⁸⁵ The current state of academic knowledge on the details of Shakespeare’s involvement in *Sejanus* is summarized in John Astington: The Globe, the Court and *Measure for Measure*, *Shakespeare Survey* 52 (2003), 133–142.

A Comparative Discovrse of the Bodies Natvral and Politique.³⁸⁶ As noted earlier, Forset offers a good example of Jacobean discourse of legal writings. In the treaty, the plot is mentioned in corporeal terms as if it “beheaded the whole Realme,”³⁸⁷ which exemplifies that the body politic becomes a “mishapen and distorted” monster if the parts or members do not perform their appointed tasks.³⁸⁸ Furthermore, Forset compares the Island of Britannia to a body that needs only one head instead of two, which is undoubtedly a clear reference to the Union of England and Scotland embodied by King James, who being a “vertuous and powerfull head should reunite and draw againe into one, the distracted and long repugning parts.”³⁸⁹ Furthermore, even Jacobean public speeches abound with examples of similar rhetoric, since King James often called himself the head and his people the body. As mentioned earlier, James sought with this propaganda to hide his partiality for his Scottish subjects.³⁹⁰

Nevertheless, identifying the King with the Head of the body politic has at least one consequence. Compared to the theory of the King's two bodies, the distinctive feature of the organic conception of the state is that it presents the Prince only as a single member of the larger organism of the body politic. As Paul Archambault explains, “the analogy of the body served the cause of a certain type of liberalism: a liberalism which, without repudiating the excellence of the monarchical form of government, constantly reminded the Prince that he was but a part, however superior, of a body larger than himself.”³⁹¹

Shakespeare's *King Lear*, a play centered on the figure of a monarch, must have relied upon the assumed Early Modern audience's knowledge of various contemporaneous ideas and notions related to the construct of the state figuratively referred to as the body politic. So far, academic discussion has focused on the relevance of the theory of the “King's two bodies” to the historical understanding of the play. But this approach limits attention to the figure of Lear and presents the notion of the body politic from his point of view, which might promote a deeper understanding of the complexity of the king's character but it reveals little about his relationships to the other characters. In what follows, I examine the traces of these corporeal governance theories in the poetic features of the 1608 Pied Bull Quarto, which allows for what I have called an “anthropomorphic mapping” of the characters' relation to the King.

³⁸⁶ Rolls: *The Theory*, 40.

³⁸⁷ Forset: *A Comparative Discovrse*, sig. H.iii. r.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, sig. H.i. v.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, sig. I.i. v–I.ii. r.

³⁹⁰ Baldo: *Partial*, 46.

³⁹¹ Paul Archambault: The Analogy of the “Body” in Renaissance Political Literature, *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 29 (1967), 53.

The Presence of the Body Politic in the 1608 *King Lear* Quarto

When exploring *King Lear* in relation to the early Jacobean intellectual milieu, Mary Axton describes the play as “a sensitive study of the disintegration of an inhuman political idea.”³⁹² In her reading, Lear’s tragic error is the misinterpretation of his own role: he tries to behave as if he had only a body natural and disregards his responsibility as a monarch. With respect to the principle of royal inheritance, he cannot assign his property as his body natural wishes, yet he disregards this restriction at the beginning of the play. Lear’s error lies in treating the question of inheritance as a family matter. In this respect, Lear is in sharp contrast with Gloster, who, having a body natural only, also commits the mistake of “misjudging his children,” yet the consequences of his error remain within the scope of the family, whereas Lear’s act precipitates a series of events that have political significance. Although in the end, Lear is able to restore his relationship with Cordelia, “there is no remedy for his offence against his body politic.”³⁹³ Mary Axton argues that Shakespeare makes the audience focus on Lear, the man, especially after the storm scene, and from this point of view, the play presents him as a man for whom “fatherhood means more than kingly power.”³⁹⁴ She also suggests that the performance of *King Lear* before King James I at Whitehall on Saint Stephen’s night in 1606 might have been understood by the audience as a warning against the non-human side of the concept of the King’s two bodies. Although Axton’s argumentation undoubtedly sounds convincing, the main shortcoming of her study is that she fails to notice that by the time of King James’ reign, and also by the assumed 1608 inception of *King Lear*, the notion of the body politic appears in a discourse slightly different from the one in which Plowden and his contemporaries participated in the Elizabethan period.

In contrast with Axton, I argue that this corporeal symbolism—with the help of rhetorical devices—demonstrates the relevance of the organic concept of state to an understanding of the subtle relationship between the characters and the king. From the beginning, the imagery of the play links expressions referring to various bodily organs to certain characters in the play. To take the most striking example briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the tropes of the heart are connected to the figure of Cordelia whose name stems from the Latin word “cor,” which means “heart.” Scholars have presented highly original and fascinating etymologies for this name, a few of which are worth citing, even if they seem far-fetched. Reginald Armstrong Foakes, mentioned in my introduction, argues that Shakespeare might have preferred Cordelia to “Cordeilla” and “Cordella,” which were also widely used

³⁹² Ibid., 137.

³⁹³ Ibid., 139.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 141.

in those days, because in the second half of the name he saw the anagram of "ideal."³⁹⁵ However, the explanation offered by Ted Hughes sounds even more imaginative, as he divides the name into two parts, the first being Cordel, which, like Ari-el (the "Light of God"), "makes her the heart of God, while her full name Cordelia makes her simultaneously the heart of Lear," or as in a French-like spelling, "Coeur de Lear."³⁹⁶ Regardless of their differences, these explanations highlight that the trope of the heart not only describes Cordelia's nature and dramatic role, it also "functions as a silent pun," relying on the etymological root of her name.³⁹⁷ Placed in the context of the organic conception of the state, Cordelia's name becomes significant as it fits into the system of corporeal images and positions her character as the heart of Lear's body politic. When she answers her father's question by twice repeating the word "nothing," she makes a whole series of allusions to this political concept. As Northrop Frye comments: "The word *nothing* we remember from *Richard II*, where it was connected with the conception of the king's two bodies. In both plays nothing seems to have the meaning of being deprived of one's social function, and so of one's identity."³⁹⁸

In the love contest scene, like Cordelia, Kent also identifies himself as an organ to describe his relationship to Lear when he calls himself the "true blanke" of the King's eye. Tibor Fabiny argues that the eye in Shakespearean drama stands "as a metaphor of proper moral judgment"³⁹⁹ and is also connected to an ancient Christian tradition that applies seeing and vision to the image of "religious understanding" and "the loss of sight" to "the loss of one's contact with God."⁴⁰⁰ Thus, when Kent offers himself to Lear as a medium of seeing, in a figurative sense, he not only reminds him that he is misjudging Cordelia's intentions but he is also in danger of losing his relationship with God, whom he, as the King, should represent on earth. On the other hand, from a societal point of view, the function of the eye, together with the ears and tongue, is applied to provincial governors in the system of John of Salisbury, who describes their position in the following manner:

A governor is one who presides over the administration of justice among the people of a province. He therefore should have knowledge of the just and unjust, and should have the means and the will to enforce justice. For although the common lot of death

³⁹⁵ Foakes: *Introduction*, 34.

³⁹⁶ Ted Hughes: *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, London, Faber & Faber, 1992, 273.

³⁹⁷ McAlindon: *Tragedy*, 87.

³⁹⁸ Northrop Frye: *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*, ed. Robert Sandler, New Haven–London, Yale University Press, 1986, 109.

³⁹⁹ Tibor Fabiny: *The Eye as a Metaphor in Shakespearean Tragedy: Hamlet, Cordelia and Edgar: Blinded Parents' Seeing Children*, in K. Kürtösi – J. Pál (eds.): *Celebrating Comparability*, Szeged, JATE University Press, 1994, 465.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 466.

ought not to be imputed to the physician, yet if tragic consequences are the result of his ignorance or lack of skill, they are deservedly charged to him. Furthermore, if he knows the proper remedy and refuses to apply it, he is condemned not for ignorance but for willful wrong.⁴⁰¹

Kent's behavior in *King Lear* corresponds, to a certain extent, to the description provided in *Policraticus*. By contradicting Lear, he exercises his duty as a member of the body politic, since in this system the eye is responsible for enforcing justice. This is precisely what Lear endangers when he banishes Cordelia. Quite remarkably, Kent's words also echo the duties of the governor cited above, as if he learned his obligations from Salisbury's *Policraticus*.⁴⁰² "Doe, kill thy Physicion, / And the fee bestow / vpon thy foule disease, / Reuoke thy doome, or, whilst I can vent clamour / From my throat, / ile tell thee thou dost euill."⁴⁰³

Still, in the Shakespearean text, as the eye of the body politic, Kent appears as "blanke." The Oxford English Dictionary provides many definitions of this word, but as for its connection with the act of looking, the following entry based on written records from the sixteenth century seems relevant here: "Of persons: (Looking) as if deprived of the faculty of speech or action; 'shut up,' utterly disconcerted, discomfited, resourceless, or non-plussed."⁴⁰⁴ Thus, the expression "the true blanke of thine eye" may metaphorically signal that, unlike Arostus in *The Tragedy of Gorboduc*, Shakespeare's Kent as an advisor can no longer function in the corporeal hierarchy of the state.

The correspondence between Kent and his function is also supported by the fact that his name is identical with the name of a province, which is in accordance with Salisbury's description, as Salisbury assigns the role of "eyes" to governors. In a different context, Dan Brayton has already noted that the majority of male characters in *King Lear* bear names referring to certain territories, for which he gives the following explanation: "geography and aristocratic identity are inextricably linked in the imagery of feudal social

⁴⁰¹ John of Salisbury: *The statesman's book*, 123. Cf. "Praeses igitur est qui in iure redendo, provincialibus praesidet. Hic autem aequi et iniqui debet habere notitiam, et facultatem et animum ejus, quod justum est, exsequendi. Nam sicut medio eventus mortalitatis imputari non debet, ita si quid triste per imperitam ejus contigerit, ei merito imputatur. Quod si novit, et non vult, non ex ignorantia, sed ex malitia condemnatur." Saresberiensis: *Policraticus*, I. 330.

⁴⁰² Without drawing further conclusions, let me note that W. R. Elton starts discussing Kent's character with a direct quotation from *Policraticus* in order to illustrate that the subjects are responsible for their superiors. W. R. Elton: *King Lear and the Gods*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1988, 284.

⁴⁰³ Shakespeare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B3r.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. OED entry for "blank" in Simpson-Weiner: *The Oxford English Dictionary*, n.p.n.

order that the play constructs."⁴⁰⁵ So when the country is seen as a body, the various counties and shires are members of that body, and the aristocrats governing them are explicitly associated with these members.

Gloster's name also recalls both a territory and the status of a governor. Moreover, his figure is also characterized by the deprivation of a corporeal function. Like Kent, he shows his loyalty to Lear, whom he still regards as the head of the kingdom. He manifestly reveals his attitude to Lear for the first time when he warns Cornwall that his order to put Kent into the stocks would insult the King. Later, his loyalty becomes the reason why Cornwall and Regan treat him as a traitor and Cornwall gouges out his eyes.

According to Fabiny, Gloster's physical blindness is expressive in the figurative sense of his moral misjudgment of his two sons, but it is necessary in order to make him "see and understand reality."⁴⁰⁶ Only after he becomes blind can he learn that Edmund betrayed him, and only then does he realize Edgar's true nature by relying on hearing only. Nevertheless, blindness, both in the physical and metaphorical sense, does not change his relationship with Lear, whom he recognizes easily even without eyes: "The trick of that voyce I doe well remember, ist not the King?"⁴⁰⁷ From Lear's point of view, Gloster contributes to his fall from power by supporting Edmund as a credible and reliable "subject" of the kingdom. Although Edmund's deception affected Gloster's ability to make clear moral judgment, the text associates the sense of hearing with his fault. In order to prove Edgar's allegedly bad intentions, Edmund makes the following suggestion: "If your honour iudge it meete, I will place you where you shall heare vs conferre of this, and by an *aurigular assurance* have your satisfaction."⁴⁰⁸ He then saves Lear's life by overhearing Cornwall's plot against him. The image of hearing and proper judgment is also directly connected with Gloster's figure in Lear's instructions to him: "a man may see how this world goes with no eyes, looke with thy eares, see how yon Iustice railes vpon yon simple theefe, harke in thy eare handy, dandy, which is the theefe, which is the Iustice."⁴⁰⁹ The emphatic presence of various references to the senses of hearing and seeing in Gloster's case seem in line with the description of the function of governors as the eyes and ears of the body politic in Salisbury's system. As in the case of Kent, Gloster's behavior and diction also resemble the behavior and diction of a physician who intends to protect the King's health, for instance in the following passage: "these iniuries / the King now beares, will be reuenged home / Ther's part of a power already

⁴⁰⁵ Dan Brayton: Angling in the Lake of Darkness: Possession, Dispossession, and the Politics of Discovery in *King Lear*, *EHL* 70 (2003), 402.

⁴⁰⁶ Fabiny: *The Eye*, 468.

⁴⁰⁷ Shakespeare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. I3v.

⁴⁰⁸ Italics are mine. *Ibid.*, sig. C2r.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, sig. I4r.

landed, / We must incline to the King. I will seeke him, and / Priuily releue him [...] though I die for't, as no lesse is threatned me, / the King my old master must be releued."⁴¹⁰ Before he is blinded on stage, he boldly confronts Regan in order to protect Lear, and he warns her, "I would not see thy cruell nayles / Pluck out his poore old eyes, nor thy fierce sister / In his aurynted flesh rash borish fangs."⁴¹¹

There is at least one other character, alongside Kent and Gloster, who undoubtedly tries to insist that justice is done, and in a highly unusual way: in Cordelia's absence, the Fool provides company to Lear and makes him confront his folly with his riddles, which figuratively comment on the plot. The Fool is known for his verbose diction, which Christy Desmet describes as "oral performances, being dependent on rhythm and sound, [which] bring cultural wisdom before the mind's eye by personification, stimulating imaginative vision through acoustic effects."⁴¹² The Fool's verbosity is in sharp contrast with Cordelia's silence at the beginning of the play. Although the audience is provided no information regarding the Fool's earlier behavior, the text of the play directly connects his intense linguistic activity with Lear's division of the kingdom and its consequences. When the Fool appears on stage, Lear notices that his singing is unusual, and when he asks him for an explanation, the Fool answers, "I have vs'd it nuncle, euer since thou mad'st thy daughters thy mothers; for when thou gauest them the rod, and put'st downe thine own breeches then they for sudden ioy did weep, and I for sorrow sung."⁴¹³ The other distinctive feature of the Fool's utterances is that he never speaks in blank verse and he makes frequent use of similes, proverbs, and "rhymed adages," sometimes much more for the sake of the audience than to communicate with the King.⁴¹⁴ Ted Hughes has observed that the real power of the Fool's words derives from the fact that they indirectly refer to Divine Truth, which the characters cannot easily perceive in "ordinary words":

But these words can encompass the truth in their fashion, on the right tongue. Their inability to declare the truth directly gives them licence to sing about it obliquely, and to glance towards it crookedly, as the hidden meaning, the irony, in the joke. The ultimate personification of this appears again in *King Lear*, as

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., sig. G1r.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., sig. H1v.

⁴¹² Christy Desmet: To See Feelingly: Vision, Voice, and Dramatic Illusion in *King Lear*, in Christy Desmet: *Reading Shakespeare's Characters: Rhetoric, Ethics, and Identity*, Amherst, Massachusetts University Press, 1992, 126.

⁴¹³ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. D1r.

⁴¹⁴ W. H. Clemen: *King Lear*, in W. H. Clemen: *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1951, 141–142.

the Fool. His paradoxes and riddles are the only communication possible for Cordelia's (the heart's) banished, speechless truth – until Cordelia herself appears in person.⁴¹⁵

Textual correspondences also reveal the complementary nature of the characters of Cordelia and the Fool. Like Cordelia, who clearly rejects the idea of flattery and lying, the Fool refuses to tell Lear what he wishes to hear and, instead, speaks what he feels Lear needs to hear: "prethe Nunckle keepe a schoolmaster that can teach thy foole to lye. I would faine learne lye."⁴¹⁶ The audience can also witness how close these two figures stand in Lear's mind when the king cries out over Cordelia's body: "my poore foole is hangd."⁴¹⁷

The organic point of view allows one to assign to the Fool the position of the tongue of the body politic, since he tries to protect the unity of the kingdom by confronting the head with the events that he, the king, has caused. Like the other governors, the function of the tongue is to enforce justice and play the role of a physician if the body of the community is injured. And this is the aspect that a gentleman replying to Kent's question highlights when he says that the Fool "labours to out-iest" the King's "heart strooke iniuries."⁴¹⁸

As for Lear's ungrateful eldest daughters, from the beginning the text of the play connects the organs of feeding and digesting to their characters. After Cordelia's statement of love, the king settles her portion of territory with the following words: "my two daughters dower digest this third."⁴¹⁹ Later, these two daughters are supposed to be responsible for providing Lear with food, but they find a way conveniently to neglect this obligation, and when the king realizes their intentions, he again recalls images of digestion. First, he refers to Oswald, Gonorill's servant, as "a pestilent gull to mee."⁴²⁰ He then metaphorically connects Gonorill to this organ as well: "O most small fault, how vgly did'st thou in *Cordelia* shewe, that like an engine wrencht my frame of nature from the fixt place; drew from heart all loue and added to the gall."⁴²¹ Moreover, when he curses her reproductive organs, he regards her future baby as the "childe of spleene."⁴²² The most frequently mentioned parts of Regan's body are her nails. First, Lear warns Gonorill, referring to Regan when he says, "when she shall heare this of thee, with her NAILES shee'l flea thy woluish visage."⁴²³ Later, in an attempt to protect the king, Gloster confronts her:

⁴¹⁵ Hughes: *Shakespeare*, 278.

⁴¹⁶ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. D1r.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., sig. L4r.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., sig. F3v.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., sig. B2v.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., sig. C4v.

⁴²¹ Ibid., sig. D2r.

⁴²² Ibid., sig. D2r.

⁴²³ Ibid., sig. D2v.

"I would not see thy cruell nayles / Pluck out his poore old eyes."⁴²⁴ Although the image of nails primarily connotes cruelty, Renaissance scientists regarded this part of the body as the digestive system's excrement.⁴²⁵ Nevertheless, before dying, Regan explicitly evokes the image of the belly when she attacks her sister, saying, "Lady, I am not well; els I should answe're / From a full flowing stomach."⁴²⁶

In the organic conception of state, the financial officers take the position of the organs of digestion, especially that of the stomach, which is also the potential cradle of all illnesses: "financial officers and keepers may be compared with the stomach and intestines, which, if they become congested through excessive avidity, and retain too tenaciously their accumulations, generate innumerable and incurable diseases, so that through their ailment the whole body is threatened with destruction."⁴²⁷

Correspondingly, in *King Lear* Regan and Gonorill behave as if they were insatiable financial officers whose task would be to provide Lear with food and shelter but whose greed and desire for power cause both Lear's madness and Gloster's blindness, the physical maladies of the plot. In addition to the allusions to digestion and the lower parts of the body, the text often applies animal imagery, especially the attribute of a fiend, to descriptions of Gonorill and Regan. However, these images seem to complement one another, as occurs in the passage in which Lear cries out when he meets Gloster: "fichew nor the soyled horse goes toot with a more riotous appetite, down frō the wast tha're centaures, though women all aboue, but to the girdle doe the gods inherit, beneath is all the fiends, thers hell, thers darknesse, ther's the sulphury pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption."⁴²⁸

As regards their position in the social hierarchy, Gloster's two sons, Edgar, who appears mostly in the guise of an outcast, and Edmund the Bastard, are positioned at the feet of the body politic. Rolls sees the two brothers' career in the play as "connected to their sympathetic relationship to the heads of England's body politic."⁴²⁹ (252-53) While the bastard Edmund can climb the social ladder in Regan and Gonorill's commonwealth, Edgar, like Cordelia, becomes an outcast in their system yet regains his status following the demise of the two sisters. Although in the brothers' case the direct organic references

⁴²⁴ Ibid., sig. H1v.

⁴²⁵ Michael Schoenfeldt: *Fables of the Belly in Early Modern England*, in David Hillman-Carla Mazzio (eds.): *The Body in Parts. Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, New York-London, Routledge, 1997, 245.

⁴²⁶ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. L1r.

⁴²⁷ John of Salisbury: *The statesman's book*, 65. "Quaestores et commentarienses as uentris et intestinorum refert imaginem. Quae, si immense aviditate congesserint at congesta tenacious reservaverint, innumerabiles et incurabiles generant morbos, ut vitio eorum totius corporis ruina immineat." Saresberiensis: *Policraticus*, I. 283.

⁴²⁸ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. I3v.

⁴²⁹ Rolls: *The Theory*, 252-253.

are missing, there are many instances that seem to allude to this lower social position. For instance, in his soliloquy at the beginning of the play, the Bastard openly articulates his rejection of "customs" representing social order and obedience as a subject, and instead he swears loyalty to "nature." Without defining what he means exactly by "nature," it is worth noticing that his self-perception is strongly connected to the image of "baseness," denoting not only a moral quality but also a social position. What drives his deeds is not hatred for the others, but his selfish need for land: "well the legitimate *Edgar*, I must haue your land, our Fathers loue is to the bastard *Edmund*, as to the legitimate [...] *Edmund* the base shall tooth'legitimate."⁴³⁰ His words reveal here that, although he rejects custom, he imagines his own prosperity as vertical movement up the social ladder. Based on one of Gonerill's statements, "My foote usurps my body" in the Quarto, Peter Stallybrass also contends that Edmund's character could be understood as representing the foot of the body politic.⁴³¹ In this role, he even recalls the image of the foot in Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthians cited above: when the question is raised whether the foot, as a foot, is "not of the body", the answer is the unambiguous affirmation that it belongs to the body. (1Cor 12:15)

Obviously, the anthropomorphic mapping of characters described above does not explain all the aspects of the semantic complexity of the body-related images of the 1608 *King Lear* Quarto. Neither should it be regarded as a perfectly balanced systematic correspondence between the Early Modern social hierarchy and the characters of the play. Yet it may enrich readings of the text by pointing out that some of its corporeal images are context-dependent and thus poetically motivated by the sociopolitical discourses of the Early Modern period.

The Disintegration of King Lear's Body Politic

If the reader considers the hierarchical social order in terms of the organic analogy that the text of the play evokes, Lear's decision to retire, or, to recall his words, "to shake all cares and busines of our state; / Confirming them on yonger years,"⁴³² appears in a different interpretive light. According to the organic conception of the state, every member of the commonwealth, like

⁴³⁰ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. C1r.

⁴³¹ "Just before Q1's "My foote usurps my body," Goneril gives a chain to Edmund, the Bastard [...] Edmund, the base, stoops his head to be kissed by his mistress; a woman's kiss, a monarch's kiss, that can stretch the spirits of the base, the feet of society "up." [...] Goneril (as woman, foot; as monarch, head) raises Edmund (as bastard, foot; as man, head) by enchainning his head." Peter Stallybrass: Footnotes, in David Hillman–Carla Mazzio (eds.): *The Body in Parts. Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, New York–London, Routledge, 1997, 318–319.

⁴³² Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B1v.

each organ of a human body, is mutually dependent on the others, and the body functions perfectly only if every part performs its duties for the benefit of the whole. Thus, when Lear resigns from the government of the kingdom, he upsets the delicate balance of the body politic and triggers the series of events that leads to the decline of the metaphorical body of the state.⁴³³ First, he dislocates himself, the head; shortly afterwards, he banishes Cordelia, the symbolic heart, and also Kent, the eye. As the action of the play proceeds, the audience witnesses the disintegration of the whole organism: Gonorill and Regan, the organs of digestion, deprive Lear of his official companions, the train of knights, and, later, even the Fool disappears without any reason. Gloster, as a governor corresponding either to the ear or the eye of the body politic, loses not only his physical sight, but also his property and social rank. His legitimate son, Edgar, becomes socially marginalized for the major part of the play. Even Lear's daughters and Edmund, the Bastard, die at the end, leaving the stage covered with the corpses of the royal family and creating a vision of the complete destruction of Lear's body politic. I find this emblematic display of the dead bodies of the actual members of the body politic a very good example of what Rosalie Colie described as Shakespeare's fascinating capacity for "unmetaphoring" the common usages of conventional expressions or literary devices by relying on and exploiting their literal sense(s) in his own poetic practice.⁴³⁴ The text of the play presents the decline of the organic system, the "body politic" in the figurative sense, with the help of an image cluster that compares the state with an unhealthy and declining body in the literal sense. Caroline Spurgeon points out that Shakespeare tends to present the state facing disturbances as a human body covered with tumors or ulcers. The image of "the kingdom [...] sick with civil blows"⁴³⁵ first appears in his history plays, and the context in which it appears implies that the members are responsible for the sickness of the body. This imagery, frequently appearing

⁴³³ Following the logic of analogical thinking, with this decision, Lear also disturbs the balance of nature or, in other words, the macrocosm, since "as Providence is the emblem of order in the universe [...] so, in the commonwealth, the emblem of order is the king." Russel Fraser: *Anarchy and Order*, in Russel Fraser: *Shakespeare's Poetics in Relation to King Lear*, London, Routledge–Kegan Paul, 1962, 72.

⁴³⁴ She uses the term "unmetaphoring" with reference to a poetic device of an author "who treats a conventionalized figure of speech as if it were a description of actuality [and thus] is unmetaphoring that figure." Rosalie Colie: *Shakespeare's Living Art*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1974, 11. Most recently, Hungarian scholar Attila Kiss has expanded on and renamed this idea "demetaphorization" in his study of the corporeal semiotics of *Titus Andronicus*, a play in which Kiss examines instances of Shakespeare's poetic practice "when the figurative unexpectedly turns brutally literal and anatomical." C.f. Attila Kiss: *Demetaphorization on the Early Modern Emblematic Stage*, in Tóth Sára – Kókai Nagy Viktor – Marjai Éva – Mudriczki Judit – Turi Zita – Arday-Janka Judit (eds.): *Szólító Szavak / The Power of Words: Tanulmányok Fabiny Tibor hatvanadik születésnapjára / Papers in Honor of Tibor Fabiny's Sixtieth Birthday*, Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem–L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2015, 295–304.

⁴³⁵ Spurgeon: *Shakespeare's Imagery*, 133.

in public discourses of English political thought in the sixteenth century, ultimately derives from John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, in which John of Salisbury applies the metaphor of sickness to describe disobedience to the monarch: "an injury to the head, as we have said above, is brought home to all members, and that wound unjustly inflicted on any member tends to the injury of the head. Furthermore whatsoever is attempted foully and with malice against the head, or corporate community, of the members, is a crime of the greatest gravity and nearest to sacrilege."⁴³⁶

Various metaphors referring to the diseased body politic, "disease," "foulness," "boils," "sore," "injury" or "wound," also appear in *King Lear*, and in accordance with John of Salisbury's description, they describe offences committed against Lear. For instance, Kent warns Lear about the consequences of his decision to banish Cordelia from his kingdom with the words cited earlier: "kill thy Physicion, / And the fee bestow vpon thy foule disease."⁴³⁷ Cordelia then states clearly that Lear has disowned her not because of some attack against him as king: "It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness, / No vnclene action or dishonour'd step / That hath depriu'd me of your grace and fauour."⁴³⁸ After Gonorill manifestly opposes Lear's wishes, the King describes his daughter as: "a disease that lies within my flesh, / Which I must needs call mine, thou art a bile, / A plague sore, an imbossed carbuncle in my / Corrupted blod."⁴³⁹ One of the most striking examples of the metaphorical connection of sickness and the state emerges when Lear not only recognizes Gonorill's and Regan's falseness, but also immediately understands his own error of judgment and its consequences, saying, "I'll forbear; / And am fallen out with my more headier will, / To take the indisposed and sickly fit / For the sound man. Death on my state!"⁴⁴⁰ Last but not least, after Lear dies at the very end of the play, Albany invests the rule of the country to Edgar and Kent so that they will "the goard state sustaine."⁴⁴¹

This study of the representation of the Early Modern body politic in *King Lear* contributes to a more nuanced understanding of and appreciation for Shakespeare's poetic practice, as it presents the characters in the context of contemporaneous governance theories. Applying the concept of the "King's two bodies," Axton explains Lear's tragic error as a misinterpretation of his own role, since he treats public affairs as if he had only a "body natural"

⁴³⁶ John of Salisbury: *The statesman's book*, 259. "Laesio capitis, ut praediximus ad omnia membra refertur, et cuiusque membri vulnus injuste irrogatum, ad capitis sectat injuriam. Caeterum quod aduersus caput aut universitatem membrorum dolo malo malatia praesumit, crime nest gravissimum, et proximum sacrilegio." Saresberiensis: *Policraticus*, II. 73.

⁴³⁷ Shak-speare: *His True Chronicle*, sig. B3r.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., sig. B4r.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., sig. F2r.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., sig. F1r.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., sig. L4r.

and disregards the monarch's responsibility for the "body politic." As opposed to Gloster, his mistaken judgment of his children leads to more serious consequences and sets off a series of events which finally results in the destruction of his state. Extending the scope of research to the "organic conception of the state" and combining it with the study of body-related images, this chapter has offered an anthropomorphic mapping of Lear's relationships to the other characters. The body-related image cluster that the text attributes to various characters corresponds to the analogical social structure of the body politic most comprehensively discussed in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, a work well-known even to Shakespeare's contemporaries. Focusing on one of the figurative layers of the text, the chapter has ultimately described King Lear's fall from power as the result of the disintegration of his body politic. From a poetical point of view, this fall appears in *King Lear* in the form of various textual references to the sick body of the state, imagery which ultimately derives from the anthropomorphic analogy permeating early Jacobean public discourses.

CONCLUSION



It is my hope with this book to have offered answers to the question of what makes the 1608 Quarto edition of William Shakespeare's *King Lear* an outstanding and exceptional work of art. Both its cover page and the record from the Stationer's Register support the idea that it was written for a special occasion for the audience of the Whitehall. In order to entertain this courtly audience, Shakespeare adopted the well-known story of King Lear and his three daughters, which could have been available to him in many versions. But as opposed to the assumedly most immediate source, the anonymous *True Chronicle Historie of King Leir*, a play very popular during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, William Shakespeare completely changed the dramaturgical context of the story. The first chapter examined the macrostructural layer of the text and showed that the 1608 *King Lear* Quarto strongly relies on the Tudor interlude tradition as it is exemplified in the case of John Skelton's *Magnyfycence*. It thus contains many elements deriving from the literary convention of the genre "speculum principis." The second chapter focused on the microstructural layer of the text, drawing attention to the rhetorical features which reveal that, at least in the case of the love contest and mock trial scenes, the characters' diction is loaded with tropes from contemporaneous public discourses. Of the various topical references, the third chapter has targeted the body-related image cluster of the play, pointing out that it corresponds to the rhetoric of the Jacobean royal discourse based on the trope of the body politic. The interpretations offered in these chapters support the idea that the 1608 *King Lear* Quarto could be read as a dramatic response to official royal propaganda and thus as a play which holds a mirror of governance to the royal court, including the King, who supposedly was present at the Whitehall performance.

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